

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture17

Modernity and Popular

Then we have modernity and 'popular', which came post-independence. We are dealing with post-independence and partition films. Modernity and 'popular' are two themes largely seen after partition. *Andaz*, one of the films by Mehboob Khan, where you have Nargis, a spoiled daughter of a millionaire, brings in the idea of modernity, what modernity means in Indian cinema. One of the striking features of modernity was secularism. So India before independence was never inclined towards the discourse of religion. But as in after independence. India started to feel that there was a lack of secularism also because of what happened during the partition. So it was the need of the hour.

With modernity, religion was never a concept and therefore secularism became a modern concept in popular discourse. Modernity was classified as good and bad. It has both the perils and the attractions, and these films embody the good and the bad.

So, when we see a character who is a doctor, we always think that the character will be good. But on the contrary, when we see a bar dancer, we always question the character. But what modernity told us is that it is not like that. The doctor can also be bad.

The bar dancer can also be good. So these discourses formulated the themes, of the films that were being made. *Bazi* is such film by Gurudatt. Then we have *Jaal*. We have *Kalabazar* and then we have a *Guide*. The *Guide* was again based on a popular book with the same title and was written by R.K. Narayan. and all these films we see are enacted by Dev Anand. He's playing the characters of a gamblers, a black marketeer, a thug and a smuggler.

These films also tell us that it was a phase in India where there was unemployment, growing unemployment, therefore the youth was kindly inclined towards what was bad, what was the byproduct of the modernity of that time. But

films like Bazi also restored the sanctity of the state authority. So it shows the police in that light in this film where it is restoring that sanctity. Nehruvian modernity, which is the city, shown in the city, is also there in these films. The city associated with urban criminals, again, is a part of modernity, the perils of modernity.

Guru Dutt's Aar Paar, Shakti Samanta's Howrah Bridge. These, again, were the films where urban criminals were, mainly the protagonist played the character of urban criminals. Then we see the agrarian themes almost leaving the screen. It was there, but it was almost on the verge of leaving. And we further see the alignment between the state authority and the feudal power in Ganga Jamuna.

Another spectacle by S.S. Vasan, Chandralekha, which was the first major effort by a Madras studio to make this film a pan-Indian film. This is one attempt made by a Madras-based studio. This film was slightly influenced by Alibaba legend so it had a few magical sequences here and there which made it quite distinct from the films that made the technology use of technology the playfulness of technology can also be compiled in the idea of modernity now people often call this period as the low period, but Ashish Rajadakhshar disagrees. He says that it was a time when the films being made discredited intelligence and enhanced their reputation for credulity and submission to make-believe, as an inquiry committee report of 1951 tells us. Was it a low period for Indian cinema? We see that no other third-world country had such a huge movie industry on this scale after its independence.

India was one such film industry which was becoming huge day by day. With the emergence, we saw the silent era, the talkie era, and the color film era. We will be talking about new cinemas. So, after the formation of the first state, which was Madras in 1956, we witnessed politics and art together in 1967, the Tamil Nationalist Party, that is the DMK, overthrew the Congress and the progress towards Tamil-speaking states. They are, pushing Tamil Nadu as the Tamil-speaking state.

We see the emergence of poets like Subramanian Bharti who scaled up the politics. They intermingled politics with art and culture. We will further see how DMK has played a significant role or how the leaders in DMK have scripted cinema, and scripted movies, which integrate, politics along with art. There was a

scenarist called C.N. Annadurai who set up the propaganda arm of this party, a filmmaking process that must be seen as one of the greatest moments of 20th-century propaganda.

Annadurai made it a point that it is out loud clear that this set up as the propaganda arm of this party, which is also into filmmaking, makes it to the overarching 20th-century propaganda cinema. M. Karunanidhi also had a minister in India, named Manthiri Kumari, which is translated as the minister's daughter in 1950. It's a folklore film that brought in future politician superstar Mr. M.G. Ramachandran and his first commercial success. Manthiri Kumari is the first ever popular successful hit for M.G. Ramachandran. Karuna Nidhi wrote famous DMK films ever. Parashakti, The Goddess, 1952.

It again saw the debut of another Tamil superstar, Shivaji Ganesan. After the 1960s, he also turned to more realistic themes like the class, peasantry, gardener, and taxi driver roles, the catering to the classless people or, the lower strata of the people. With moving on from politics to class, there has been a shift from scripts M. Karunanidhi wrote, and he has largely contributed to the Tamil cinema. In 1967, the regional state of Kerala gave new directions to the role of cinema in national formation, which is the industrial nationalist route.

The regional new cinema that we will be discussing. Kerala was one state that got its upgradation before any other state. Before any other state that made regional cinema. The Kerala State Film Development Corporation was upgraded to a public-sector undertaking in 1975. and by 1987, as many as 86 of 126 films were made in Malayalam.

It is indeed a big deal. More than half the films that released by the year 1978, were made in the Malayalam language. and then we have Adoor Gopalakrishnan, who made the film called Swayamvaram in 1972. And Adoor Gopalakrishnan is quite a renowned filmmaker of Malayalam cinema, Malayalam film industry.

From anti-feudal criticizing traditional elites to showcasing the virtues of new regional state policies. These were the topics that were very common in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Manipur. The themes of anti-feudal, criticizing traditional elites. Some internationally renowned new cinema initiatives with regional state subsidy as the films by Adoor

Gopalakrishnan, G.R. Ravindan, Girish Karnad, B.V. Karnad and Girish Kasaravalli were being made in various languages. here is a list which is in various languages, which is in Malayalam and Kannada. and then it can be there for reference. we have what is called the parallel cinema or the new wave cinema. It is called parallel cinema because it did not replace the popular. It was a reaction to the popular cinema that was being made during that time. So, it emerged towards the end of the 1960s. and mainly led by Bengali cinema makers. we have filmmakers like Mrinal Sen.

We have filmmakers like Satyajit Ray. We have other filmmakers in the Hindi film industry as Mani Kaul and Govind Nihalani. these people were the pioneers of the new wave cinema. Mani Kaul began with a loan. from the film finance corporation and his debut film was Uski Roti and the same year Mrinal Sen made Bhuvan Shomai.

Though it is not largely part and parcel of popular culture films, we still are discussing this film because it is very important. If you remember 1955, the film that made Indian cinema global was Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchali, which is a new wave cinema or which is a parallel cinema. These films deal with the lives of everyday people.

They were just common people who were living their everyday lives and how their lives were showcased. Capturing the emotions, capturing the poverty, capturing the everydayness was the theme of parallel cinema at large. Apu Trilogy by Satyajit Ray. Satyajit Ray also made two Hindi films.

He has only directed two Hindi films. One is again based on Premchand's "Shatranj Ke Khiladi". and then we have Ritvid Ghatak's Nagrik. We have Maya Darpan by Kumar Sahni. and we have Akrosh by Govind Nihalani. The traces of the films that these parallel cinema directors were making were very hard-hitting to the realism, of the social domain. and then Akrosh is one such film where we have actors like Nasiruddin Shah, Om Puri, and Smita Patil. This film is important because, In the whole film, Om Puri does not speak. He has no dialogue. and in the end, he just shouts. This film is a satire on the judiciary system. Om Puri is a tribal farmer, and his wife is raped by the elite landlords when he goes to the police station he is charged with his wife's murder, it is also reflecting the pettiness of the landlord class or the feudal system at large and he is arrested

the wife commits suicide and during the trials and tribulations in the court, his father also gets a heart attack and passes away. and he gets bail, and parole to attend the funeral of the father. and in that process, these elite landlords and the policemen, are eyeing her sister. He already knows the coming of events that she will also be raped and killed, or she will commit suicide in the end. He decides to just kill her so in front of everyone he just kills the sister to save her from the discomfort and pain that she will be enduring after he again goes back to the jail and that is the scene where he shouts it is a painful angst in the end in a way to emote whatever he had been feeling throughout the film With this came escapist cinema. and when we say escapist cinema, there are reasons why, such films are made. So, when we are discussing escapist cinema, we see that there are reasons why this film came up. Just like neorealism after World War, Italian neorealism.

Due to the Sino-Indian War, in 1962 and its after-effects the country, the society becomes so desolate, so unhappy, and so pessimistic that you need relief. And this escapist cinema gave them that sort of relief. There was a shift to picturesque locales. Initially, the films, the shot or the shooting of the films were not in different locations. But with escapist cinema, we see picturesque locations of Kashmir, of the beautiful valley and those places. Then the city was a site of optimism. In these escapist films, we see that the city where life had been pessimistic. It acts as a site of optimism. In films like Raj Kapoor Sangam Kashmir Ki Kali a family reunion called Waqt. All these films are shot in, you know, picturesque locales. It gives a site of optimism. The beautiful valley of Kashmir is captured in Kashmir Ki Kali. It also reminds me of De Sica's Bicycle Thieves, which is also an Italian new realism film. and it shows the whole city of Rome. Similarly, Kashmir Ki Kali. Rajendra Kumar and Jeetendra were the most successful actors of this time.

Manoj Kumar's career started with Upkar in 1967. It was an allegory and it showed some it showed war with Pakistan. and that was the introduction of Manoj Kumar to Indian cinema.

Very important topic of Indian cinema is the era of Indira Gandhi. So with escapist cinema, we come to the age where there is political turmoil happening with the emergency and the toppling of the government. But the films had themes which were, of course, politically charged, but they also directly in a way

embodied Indira Gandhi's era. Not exactly Indira Gandhi, but the era of Indira Gandhi. So there was a film called Padosan and very interestingly, a very popular song in the film, Mere Samne Wali Khidki Mein, where we see two people, one, of course, very

distinctly looks like South Indian, which is Mehmood. and there is Sunil Dutt, who plays the character of a North Indian man. and then there is Ashok Kumar. So, Mehmood and Sunil Dutt, both are wooing Saira Banu in this song. and Ashok Kumar helps Sunil Dutt to woo her by singing a song. Through this song, they are trying to woo the lady and this film is politically charged film on Mrs. Gandhi's broken up initially during the formation of the Tamil Nadu state we saw earlier how it affected But this Congress syndicate between Kamaraj and Nijalingappa is very evident. These two characters are sort of playing and Nijalingappa is also bald which is portrayed by Mehmood. there is a film called Aradhana released in 1969 by Shakti Samanta where during this era which catered to the age of Indira Gandhi.

In this film, he plays A pilot, which is again very significant to, Rajiv Gandhi, Mrs. Indira Gandhi's son. We see that he passes or passes, he's dead. and same, we see that Rajiv Gandhi also passed away. Again, this film has elements of the era of Indira Gandhi in this film.

Then we have Anand, we have Bawarchi, we have Bobby. In the film Bobby, when Indira Gandhi came to power after, the toppling of the government, the BJP came and then again Indira Gandhi came to power. She was demonstrating entrepreneurship for small industries. and in this film,

Again, it is very evidently depicted. So "Bobby", the character of the girl, her father is a small entrepreneur, whereas she's in love with a rich guy, which is Rishi Kapoor. And the conflict between these two classes is presented. And "Jai Santoshi Maa" is shown as the embodiment of, Indira Gandhi. Indira Gandhi took care of the children, which is the common populace of India. The 1970s grew grotesque due to the political turmoil. Political faith was absent because of so many things going around in this time. and then Gandhi's anti-Western bias is shown bizarrely in films like Mukaddar Ka Sikandar, Trishul, Shakti and Agnipath. The slight idea of control is quite evident in these films. Then the most famous of these was "The Angry Young Man".

In films like Deewar, Mukadda, Kasikandar, and Trishul, the famous Amitabh Bachchan, is known to be the angry young man. He has been, addressing the political rhetoric, the social injustices, playing the role of coolie, playing the role of a labour union and the scars of injustice manifest in the life of illegality, although through honour. There is, he is showcasing illegality, but there remains a sense of honour. In the film Deewar, you know, his father was a leader of the union. Because of circumstances, his father becomes like a thief and people out loud call him a thief and also write it on his arm, which he remembers for quite some time as he grew up. He decides to take the illegal path. The high point was reached in Mohan Desai's Amar Akbar Anthony. and this is a very brilliant film to showcase the age of Indira Gandhi or the era of Indira Gandhi.

There are other scholars also who have written only about this film, how it was so politically charged and how little connotations of the time have been imbibed in this film. It says the utopic vision of India is secular and pluralistic because there were three brothers. and one day, suddenly, the mother loses all three children together. Not together, but one by one. and then all of the three come up in a different religion.

One son, which is Amar, the youngest, the oldest, is a Hindu police officer. The second, which is Anthony, Amitabh Bachchan, is a Christian and the youngest is Abdul he is brought up in the Muslim religion and a few stereotypes have also been quite evidently produced in this film like Christians always drinking and Muslims professional professions which is like Tailor. These are also the purviews of this film.

The author is concerned with the rise of Hindu nationalism as per viewing the metaphors for the Indian home and family. So the rise of Hindu nationalism can also be witnessed in this film where the whole responsibility of bringing things together and reuniting the mother with all the children is on the shoulder of the Oldest brother, which is Amar, played by Vinod Khanna, and he's also a Hindu and presented as a Hindu in that film. The Hindu brother upholds the state in his work as a police officer and embodies a rational law. Then comes Amar also analyzing the ideal moral universe of secular nationalism. Since he is integrating all the brothers, he is also talking about the plurality of the nation and secularism at the same time. Therefore, this film is important in art, cinema and the violent

decade of the 80s. What kind of films came in the 80s? We have films that categorize the art cinema.

In art cinema, it was about the individual. It was no more character types or the politics or the social reformists. But it was the individual who was very important in these films. Films like "Rajnigandha" where a woman is in turmoil as to which man she likes more. What she as an individual wants to do in her life. "Namak Haram" again by Rishikesh Mukherjee where we see Amitabh Bachchan. Then there is Abhiman. Abhiman is again by Rishikesh Mukherjee, who he plays husband and wife with his wife, which is Jaya Bachchan. and they both are singers.

Individuals' insecurities as a husband and the wife are in the same profession, are dealt with in this film, This is situated in films because of the growing regionalism, Mrs Gandhi's agenda was a power play, evident in vote bank politics. which again very significantly is produced in many of the films, not located at the centre, but scattered in and around these films. One is Insaaf Ka Tarazu.

It also talks about how the position of women has been placed in cinema. If you are a woman who is modern and glamorous, you tend to get raped. But if you are a woman who drapes a sari, you might not be raped. So that is one of the closing scenes which this film Then there is regional identity in Ankush by N. Chandra and then Ek Dujay Ke Liye, Pratighat and Tezaab.

Then comes Mansoor Khan's Kayamat Se Kayamat Tak and Batwara also talking about regional politics and the evident vote box politics in small instances. Liberalization in India started in the 1990s, though the act or the reform were proposed in 1991, 1992, but the beginning is evident in the 1990s. and we also see a political reason for the economic downfall of India to an extent was the downfall of the USSR, and the socialist republic India also to an extent, the Nehruvian socialism that we talk about was brought in by the USSR, brought in from USSR rather. and now it is collapsing. in this moment of collapse, our finance minister, our then finance minister, Mr. Manmohan Singh, brings in reforms of liberalization. and with liberalization, the foreign market was open for India. and it is very, again, very much exercised in the films that came in the

1990s. During liberalization, we see that there was a break from Nehru and socialism.

Already socialism which is the socialist, nation, the USSR, which was falling. So the same consequence was seen in India. and then we had Sooraj Barjatia, Hum Aapke Hai Kaun, which embodies the Ram Raj, the Ayodhya and the Babri. The case was ongoing, and the start of Hindu nationalism was also during the 1990s.

The 1990s along with liberalization was also a witness to these changes and then we have Baazigar where we see the clash of the business classes. So coming of liberalization also resulted in competition and this competition led to clashes which is again evident in the film. Nehruvian socialism has left the screen, thereof the hero had to withdraw from the culture and tradition. What is important to note is that earlier, all the films and again, when we will come to mythology, and romance, we will see that All the Indian films are somehow linked or attached to the larger framework of the culture and tradition of India.

But in the 1990s, to an extent, we see that they are moving further away because Nehruvian socialism has also left. There is nothing to prove for the hero. It is important to witness what came next it was also perceived as withdrawal from the state. It is making a drift from the state, which is also very important. Films like Salaam Bombay brought in Hindu-Muslim romance in 1995. It is also largely talking about what happened in Bombay during the 1995 bomb blast and based on that, it brings in the essence of the Indian idea of secularism. In the post-1990s, we see Govinda being introduced as a post-modernist hero or an element of post-modernism because the post-modernism we know has a lot to do with Pastiche. Pastiche was blank, but not parody. Consciously mimicked, but blankly. Close resemblance to Bhawarchi and Sholay. Films that he was doing this time. and he was alone who did well in this genre, bringing in pastiche and parody together, and located himself in such films. In Bawarchi, which again is very significant, because it is about a person who is not a member of the family but comes to the family to integrate the family. and resemblance to that, he did a film where he is the son of a businessman, but to woo, to earn that earned the girl from the family, he goes in as a cook and persuades everyone in the family, it is like Bawarchi. He was not an archetype like Shammi Kapoor. He was more like a pastiche. He used to bring things together from different places and used to put it together in the film. Later, a different genre of patriotic films came to the center

during the 1990s and these patriotic films were different from the partition films. The probable disruptor or probable enemy had always been Pakistan because it is post-partition. One such film was "1942: A Love Story", "Border", where we see the adversaries are always Pakistan. Earlier it was the British and now it is Pakistan. In this period of the 1990s, we also see the coming up of thriller and gangster films, the popular thriller and gangster films.

One such film was Satya, released in 1998. and it is in the lineage of Comedian Gangs of Wasseypur. But of course, it was released before. It showed the police as not weak, unlike Agnipath, which showed gangs as individual agency, and state as authoritative. So, the state still had control in the 1990s this is what the films depicted even if it was named the thriller or gangster age Shool again is an important film where we see a police officer who is not a mere employee but an embodiment of the state, he is representing the police is representing the whole state or nation.