

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture18

Globalization and Hindi Cinema

Globalization of Indian cinema or Hindi cinema. Hindi cinema was most identified with A grade or B grade. So initially, there were only two categories, A grade and B grade. A grade where the A-listers acted and B grade were mainstream horror films like Naagin, the other horror films like Jani Dushman and all. The spectator profile has led to several identifiable kinds.

There is a reshuffling of the films which is happening from grades A and B they are no longer categorized as A and B, but from A to E and it is based on the spectator. Who are the people who are watching these films? The Anglophone mainstream films, which are the urban people who generally watch these films, these films are represented by three idiots. This is one of the films where we see that the Anglo mainstream audience likes these films. Then we have the B, which is semi-urban films like Dabang, mostly the remake films of the Southern industry.

We see and situate it in the semi-urban category. C, we have the continuation of the B category. which is like films like Jism and Raj. and then we have comedy films in the D category like Vicky Donor and al, Barfi that stand apart from mainstream Bollywood. It is not exactly art cinema, but, some traces of art cinema in this D category of films, which is also, comedy and at the same time with satire. and it also caters to social issues of those times. Many mainstream actors are working in this category, but these are not large-budget films, the budget situates this film in the D category. The E, which is dramatic, and realistic, but less issue-based cinema like Gangs of Wasseypur, The Lunchbox.

What is striking is films like Wake Up Sid, Life in a Metro are sort of art cinema, but rather misplaced. This category has been misplaced by actors like Ranbir Kapoor. Ranbir Kapoor is doing the Anglo mainstream films. He is also doing this small, D category, like Barfi.

He's venturing into something called Wake Up Sid, where the audience is maturing with the character. So, it is very individualistic. and he's catering and rejecting it at the same time. Budget became an indicator of such kind of films in this era and the DVD revolution kind of made it even more accessible. So we see that this category of films moreover increased because of the coming of the channels and became a source of income for small-category cinema it was greatly indebted to DVD revolution and because of globalization, the market became open, and we could get those DVDs in India as supply became easy and convenient. Because of that, we witnessed a surge in the remake of Hollywood films. Few Hollywood films that had a remake, not very refined, but which left an impact on or contributed to the Indian cinema. One such film was Manorama which was a remake of Six Feet Under. Zinda which is a remake of Old Boy is Bheja Fry, Lee Diner Decons and then Shanghai which is Z. The budget weakens the melodramatic motives. The reason is that the moral side is scarcely visible, and the ethic of personal aspiration has been introduced. So What is this ethic of personal aspiration?

Is that how an individual pursues the aspiration? On which level are they compromising with ethics? That has been questioned in the motives of these melodramatic representations of the films. The moral side is scarcely visible to these protagonists. They are the protagonists who are playing such roles. Few films are three idiots. Then there is Bunty and Bubbly and Guru, especially in Bunty and Bubbly. Very evidently, these two become thieves and thugs. So you see, they're compromising on the ethics of personal ethics or on moral side. and therefore, it legitimizes the illegitimate.

In a way, Dhoom 2 is a good example again of legitimization of the illegitimate. There is the beginning scene of the film Dhoom 2 where we see that. Hrithik Roshan is disguised as queen and then he steals the crown with the Kohinoor. and it is reclaiming what was ours once and therefore, again, legalizing the illegals. Then came sports films. They generated some sort of nationalism and patriotism. One such film was Chak De India. It is a film that was kind of putting the state to question as to what a state does for sportspersons. Then we had Paan Singh Tomar and Iqbal.

These revolved around, different games. Chakde India was for hockey. Paan Singh Tomar, again with hockey and Iqbal with cricket. These were few of the

films that were popular films made on sports. We are not dwelling into the biopics, but again, we can say significantly that these films had impacted.

Indian popular has been popular because of the melodrama. What is melodrama? The Indian melodrama is again very different from the Western melodrama that we talk about in film studies or what M.K. Raghavendran has also discussed. It is the intense emotional polarization and schematization. So there is a lot of intensity that goes into the emotions, often portraying extreme situations with overt villainy. The situations are very extreme. So what are the chances of a woman losing all the kids, three kids on the same day in Amar Akbar and Anthony and the husband also getting arrested on the same day? We see extreme situations like this and overt villainy. For example, Mogambo. dips the people in acid to kill them, which is grotesque, inflated expressions, abrupt changes in fortune. Today, I am the son of a supposed thief in Deewar and tomorrow I just join the smugglers and my fortune changes. The famous dialogue between the two brothers and there are dark plot lines. So, this is what makes it a melodrama. It draws heavily from emotionally charged everyday life events, such as murder, crime, natural disasters, trials, arrests and impoverishment. The trials and the dialogue between two people are intensified because of the kind of emotions that are brought in. and there is a lot of music also, which adds to the emotional effect and further melodramatizes the scene. This genre focuses on dramatic violations of emotional relationships, showcasing tragedies like a mother losing a child, as I just gave an example. Therefore, it evokes sympathy because so many incidents happened with this lady in one day. But despite these dramatic events, Indian melodrama typically does not change the essence of the protagonist. So with a protagonist, nothing is changing. For example, in Deewaar. He is crude. He is illegal. But we don't see that his nature is changing and he just transforms himself and becomes like a saint. No, he's not doing that. In films like Awara, characters like the judge, I already discussed the film Awara, Raj Kapoor and being the son of a judge, exhibit subdued behaviour, not due to personal remorse, but because of revelation like discovering a familial connection. This attachment with the family. is again brought up in melodrama. Additionally, there is a concept of moral occult, which is present in Indian melodrama, where divine interventions of private deliberation by gods. There might be some instances in the film where a human cannot control the situation and the evil therefore, there is a divine intervention that is taking place in the film

to control the evil or to eradicate the evil or to eradicate the wrong for example, in Hum Aapke Hain Kaun in the end scene, there is a dog. The dog is the embodiment of something that is beyond human and what this dog does is that the protagonist's brother is going to get married to the heroine, the heroine writes a letter stating that I'm sorry because of the circumstances. I am marrying your brother, your elder brother, but I love you. The dog takes the letter and gives it to the elder brother. The elder brother realises that he is about to sin. and therefore, he brings the hero and heroine together and the film ends on a happy note. How this divine intervention in the form of this dog has been placed in the movie? For example, all the films under the domain of romance have a similar kind of closure. It might end with a happy ending. The hero and the heroine finally patch up, the families have agreed, or they have eloped, and they have got married. The closure is fixed.

The closure of narratives, as it is said, is closed because they repeatedly use familiar conventions. But there are a few films that have a different closure. For example, in a film where the protagonist enters a new state of realization, even if it leads to death. The hero decides that I am going to fight a war, and I cannot marry, but I'll come back and marry.

But there could be a thing that he doesn't come back. So you see the protagonist entering and also has a realization that he might not come back. Then there are characters learning something significant by the end of the story. Wake up Sid, maturing to decide that they both are not good for each other and then moving on with their lives. Overcoming obstacles or finding peace with it. It might be that, you k, they again do not come over the obstacles of the family and then they marry someone else. Silsila is also one such example and then there is recognizing success or failure. The protagonists are the romance becomes a kind of a subplot in the film and recognizing success or failure becomes the main plot line of the story.

Demonstrating the maturing and growth of individual again the same example which is wake up said and then we have weakening or defeat as seen in the story which is devdas so in the end devdas dies so kayamat se kayamat tak is another example where they kind of die together in the end they they believe that the society cannot understand them and it is better for them to die and why the romance hinges on some ideas or why the films made on romance hinges on

some points. What are those points? One is the Hindu philosophical term of life. There is Brahmacharya, there is Grihastya and there is Sanyasin. So moving on from the Brahmacharya, which is the student life to the Grihastya is very important to showcase in order to Keep alive the Hindu philosophy of life stages. And there is Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. Vanaprastha is retired and then Sanyasa is renouncing the life and are recognized. The narrative closure in films often aligns with these life stages. Marring symbolizes significant culmination, particularly the transition from brahmacharya to grihastya has been addressed in the romantic films or romance films. The connection highlights how film narratives can reflect broader cultural and philosophical themes. echoing social values.

Bringing in again the idea of Indian culture and tradition with the idea of Hindu philosophy and placing it so that it echoes the societal values in the film is what is important, and this is how the romantic films or the romance films, the popular romance films have been made in India. Another very important topic is mythology and why mythology is so important to see, and witness is because the Indian cinema. which is taken from Parsi theatre has different genres of mythology when we say mythology, it is not restricted to the Hindu mythology alone, but bringing in from or inheriting from the Parsi theatre, also from the Iranian legends. We have other, we have historical dramas as well from which and romances from poetry that are taken and brought in the realm of what we call as mythology. We have elements from Arabian night fantasies and then we have historical events and narratives from plays and legends like Raja Harish Chandra. Then we have Rustom and Shohrab. We have Shireen Farhad and significantly it shows the cultural importance of India. obviously India has been ruled by Mughals.

Therefore, we cannot divide the mythology but instead we can integrate the mythology of the Iranian and the Persian bringing in again Arabian Nights. So there are films like which has been made by Himanshu Rai called Ali Baba and Chalis Chor and it was made in association with the Soviet Union and it is one of the highest grossing films in Soviet Union as well. Scholars like John Lyden have said that cinema is like a Quasi-religious experience, and it explores images, relationships, beliefs, desires and fears through specific forms and notably the revered status of film stars. Religious films historically associated with women

and the reason being they were traditionally avoided by elite and women were the people who were at home. Women were the people who were catering to the traditions more. and therefore, it was also liked or historically associated with women more. The elites did not like the mythological films.

They are construed as non-religious. Then we have the fashionable youths also who did not like the, films. made on mythological films. The cinematic portrayal of religious themes mirrors broader social values and spiritual traditions, which enriches the overarching domain of Indian cinema, and it adds to the cultural fabric of India as a whole. Cinema was influenced by foreign films. One such example was Life of Christ, where Dada Saheb Phalke got his inspiration to make Raja Harish Chandra. But we have Cecil B. De Melle's productions like Ten Commandments and King of the Kings. So which also exemplifies that God is box office.

There is a book by Kajri Jain where she talks about Gods in the bazaar and how the economy has been, or the consumption or commodification of gods has taken place. Suggesting that religious subject matters can draw large audience. There are devotional films also, which can be construed under religious films. Mythology is also one of them. Rachel Doyle's book, Filming the Gods, discuss it in length. One devotional film made in Gujarati was Narsi Mehta. witnessing Vrajilila and there is another film Jai Santoshi Maa again very important uh narrates the birth and rise of goddess Santoshi, what is the striking difference between mythological cinema and devotional cinema is mythology tells the story of the gods whereas devotional talks about the relationship between God and a human or the individual. that is a basic difference between the two.

What is the importance of the idea of darshan. Christopher Pinney has discussed the concept of darshan, and it emphasizes on the exchange of looks between the God and the human or the devotee. and it has been seen as a tactile connection and Ponty's idea in Ponty's idea it is double sensation where seeing becomes a form of touching so the God comes and it has it takes a glance at the devotee and the devotee is also glancing at the at the deity and in that moment there is something called double sensation happening being touched and touching.

Both incidents are taking place at the same moment in the early Indian cinema, we had other films which were made on the similar theme of mythology and

devotion, such as BuddhaDev, Savitri, and Prem Sanyasa. Kamala Bai Gokhale was one lady or woman actor who was introduced through mythology films and perhaps she was the first female actress to act in Indian cinema. These films showcase a rich tapestry of religious, mythological and historical narratives that have shaped the Indian cinematic history. Then we have Islamicate films. Islamicate films can be put in genres, historical films where we have fantasy, then we have fantasy and courtesan films. and these were the popular Islamicate films. These historical films dealt with, the history of the Religion, Fantasy, about films like Ali Baba Chalis Chor Then there is Shireen Farhad, where there are magical instances, the flying carpet. and then we have courtesan films like Umrao Jaan, which cater to the not the religious aspect of Islam as a religion, but more to the culture of Islam and in these courtesan films, we saw two kinds of themes where these courtesans were challenging the society at large. Second, it was talking about the male vorism and the fantasies that were portrayed. and few films of the Islamic age genres were Mahboob's film Al-Hilal. This is also called The Judgment of Allah. and this Al-Hilal used again, we can see some political connotations through the terminologies that he uses like Gulam, Azad, Kaidi. Then we have Humayun starring Nargis and Ashok Kumar, which emphasizes the good relation between Mughals and the Rajputs. Again, bringing in the idea of secularism. and it also shows Islamic miracles. So the son is sick and a father is praying. and in that moment, he prays that his son should be saved even if he has to die. So, a lightning strikes him, and he dies, and the son is saved.

The idea of Islamic miracle is also present. and Islamicate films are more known because of its use of poetry and Urdu. Urdu poetry represents poet like, of yester times Majhoo Sultan Pari and Shahir Ludhianvi. Then with the moving time, the lyricists, who came, who wrote Urdu lyrics were Anand Bakshi, and then we have today we can see the contemporary Javed Akhtar and Gulzar taking up.

Earlier, what is very important to note is that Urdu was used and spoken before independence by Hindus and Sikhs and, In India and around India and it was like one of the widespread usage. But with the coming of partition, India most dominates, is dominated by Hindi language and the usage of Sanskrit.