

# INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

## Lecture19

### contemporary popular and Celebrity Culture

What is this contemporary popular? Through the years, through the time we have come, post-2000, we are trying to cover, and we'll be also dealing with celebrity stars and celebrity culture. We see post-2000, there was a rise of the upper middle class. and therefore, the idea of going on a vacation became very predominant with the film like films like Dil Chahta Hai. Trying to plan a vacation to Goa with friends. this idea changed the avenue of popular cinema. Experimental films, well, they also came and they were also popular like Raincoat, Rang De Basanti, Wake Up Sid, Taare Zameen Par. Though they were low-budget films, they did well in terms of numbers. and then a few other low-budget films with diverse themes were Hazaro Khwaishe Aisi, Black, Vicky Donor and Kahaani.

Another set of films, which recreated the violent era were Gangs of Wasseypur and Sahib Biwi aur Gangster. While Bahubali had a huge fan following it did well Pan India. It offered a more nuanced portrayal of women. But as compared to KGF and Arjun Reddy. Again, when we are talking about contemporary films. The contemporary popular, we see that they have been critiqued for the representation of women to be very stereotypical. They are just like the supporting romantic roles. Analyzing these films from the lens of women's representation highlights that there is a need for more diverse and empowering roles for women in Indian cinema. Though they have attempted, most often we see the empowering roles in biopics. we have few biopics where we see that women have played significantly important roles without needing the support of a superstar, for example, Mary Kom, Saniya. Other biopics like No One Killed Jessica, etc. Then came the era of OTT. OTT came in 2012 in India with Ditto TV, which was a subsidiary of Zee.

But until the arrival of Amazon, Amazon Prime and Netflix, people did not address OTT as it had been addressed for a very long time, OTT was there, but

did not constantly produce good content. What happened during the Pandemic is quite remarkable.

It was pandemic that reintroduced OTT and the content, the kind of content they were making to the Indian audience. and with OTT, content became the king. Content is king in the OTT platform. With that, we also see the A-lister film actors coming into the OTT. Initially, it was a web series.

Web series were dominated by soap opera actors and mainly new actors who wanted to make it big to the films. Therefore, with the change in 2023 and 2024, we significantly see a change and shift. where the A-listers are joining these, OTT platforms for the release of the films. The first Indian film to be released in OTT was Shirley. it also marked a significant shift in the distribution model.

This is what we'll be talking about in the OTT chapter. Therefore, I'm not elaborating on it here. Certain trends have emerged from OTT and one such is the Angry Young Man. Other than the content being king, we have films like we have archetypes like Arjun Reddy, Kabir Singh and KGF. Again, the return of the rise of what we call as pan-Indian films has been witnessed in contemporary popular cinema or time.

According to Vogue 2020 witnessed a release of 22 Indian OTT films featuring A-listers like Deepika Padukone, Ajay Devgan and Anushka Sharma. Deepika Padukone's film was released in OTT. Then there was Ajay Devgan and then again Anushka Sharma.

In 2023, Kareena Kapoor made an entry into the OTT space with films like Jaane Jaan. We also saw Darlings which featured Alia Bhatt. We can say that there is no boundary. It's a stage where democratization is happening. Democratization is a term that is used in celebrity culture, and we can witness it in the larger paradigm of what we call as Indian cinema today. Overall, the OTT film landscape is evolving with a strong emphasis on Quality storytelling. the basic idea of OTT has become quality storytelling. Diverse content, also regional and vernacular content is coming in these platforms and making it huge.

Integration of renowned actors, as I just mentioned, of Deepika Padukone and Alia Bhatt and again Kareena Kapoor. Dynamics changes reshaping. The Indian film industry in response to digital platforms and shifting audience preference.

The audience preference has taken a turn. We cannot see the big stars on TV. We always want to see the stars in big theatre halls. Even the stars had similar ideas that they didn't want to come and be very inclusive. They wanted to be exclusive. But that demarcation has been now removed with the coming up of OTT.

Today, we will discuss celebrity studies, which are part and parcel of celebrity culture. Celebrity studies have manifested itself in different ways. Few of them are studies of renown. Then we have star bodies and celebrity. Desecration of celebrity and celebrity suffering memoirs. These constitute celebrity studies. As the name states, studies of renown are nothing but the study of the people who have now become renowned because of their art, maybe because of talent or because of being a sports person. Celebrity by Rojek is a term that comes from celebrity and philanthropy. and then we have celebrity suffering memoirs, which in a way sell their suffering and become celebrities. According to Eliot and Boyd, contemporary celebrities that we see today transform and reinvent themselves within seconds, within time and the ways that they are using are very inauthentic, and very unethical. To become famous, to become a celebrity, they are celebrating and endorsing a culture of inauthenticity. Now, Chris Rojek says that they use.

How to locate these contemporary celebrities? Key indicators that he says are parody, pastiche and sudden transformation. These are the key indicators of becoming a contemporary celebrity. Turner discusses democratization. Now democratization is important. It is a democratic turn that the celebrities or a platform where celebrities come has taken. A celebrity is a celebrity because of certain reasons and those reasons are nothing but the traditional way they use to be in the limelight, to be in the presence of media, as entertainment, as sports, etc. This democratic turn has brought in more inclusivity. This inclusivity brings in the influencer celebrities or the contemporary celebrities to cross over domains what we call influencer celebrities are becoming actors becoming musicians becoming other celebrities of the traditional norm whereas these traditional celebrities are also venturing into the influencer celebrities, for example, Farah Khan, who is a renowned choreographer and a director, has started her own YouTube channel and it is garnering a lot of attention. She is venturing into this influence influencer celebrity whereas people like Prajakta Koli who started with

YouTube channels are getting roles in films, this democratization of the demotic turn termed by Turner can be conceived in two ways. One is by the virtue of the public renown. What is the virtue of the traditional celebrity and the actions they perform? They thrive upon their celebrity status and their status as a celebrity helps them to work for a cause for example one wants to work for UNICEF because of their celebrity status it becomes easy for them to work for a cause and their followers, fans will eventually like them even more and also if it is like to generate monetary help the fans and the followers will contribute it is like working for a larger cause. On the contrary, the second one as to bringing in the discussion of democratization, how it is conceived is, a person who does not intend to, make a change, but to become a celebrity, but indeed is just trying to do the work. and in that instance, he or she transforms into a celebrity, for example, there was a boy who captured a video about health drinks and these health drinks contained a lot of sugar he was calling out these companies and the company sent a legal notice to this boy, and he couldn't answer to the risk, he couldn't respond on his behalf, many scientists and doctors' research shows that their company's products actually have a lot of sugar and therefore they had to, cut down the amount of sugar used in their health drinks. He became an overnight sensation, his hard work, and his working for a cause made him a celebrity. These are the two ways where we see how celebrities are made.

Second, what produces a celebrity? The shift where you one day is someone and then you are nobody. The next day you become Somebody. It's a surge of interest that is taking place in them, as in the person, people believe in them. They are perceived as responsible acts. and it also generates a celeaffect. Celeaffects, again, come from two words, that is celebrity and affect. The theory of affect is hinging upon emotions. What kind of emotions do you generate? effect of the action, the work that you do leaves an impact on the individual or the person who follows you. Therefore, it is an important form of democratization. One is celebrification which grows from a set of cultural values and as the valorization of values. The best example is of sports celebrities, such as biopics, where celebrification is happening of that idol. The media covers everything they document the career, event by event, match by match for a very long time, the endurance, the training they go through, the bodily fitness.

And this is how they become celebrities. Social media-driven, bio-social networks. This is the second way in which democratization happens. The sharing of similar but not identical sufferings through circuits of mediated effect. you are sharing your, misery, glamour of misery, what is called and brought in with the example of Oprah Winfrey and everyone in the audience gets affected. This effect is how democratization works. These celebrity studies move beyond identifying celebrity power but not in the way that it used to be seen. Even if the power is temporarily limited, they want that power for some time. It's not like they want to sustain that power.

The only agenda is the limelight for a temporary period. This making of an effect-driven intimate public demonstrates not only celebrity power but also addresses suffering and victimhood, resistance, survival, and triumph. These are part and parcel of the process of democratization. Now, with everyday life, the speed to becoming a celebrity has increased, and the speeding of celebrification has taken place dramatically. The reason is the speed of the internet with the uh, digital technologies, and all we see nowadays is that instantly within seconds everything can become a piece of news that is speeding celebrification; there are various platforms through which it happens. They are basically through campaigns, social media, through Instagram, through blog posts, etc. For celebrities to emotionalize themselves, it is just a matter of time. They can just come to the screen or sit at home and use their cell phones to shed tears, it becomes very sensational.

This celebrity activism also kind of we see on one hand humanizes the celebrity and it reinforces self-consciously the star status in the performance of activism. Skepticism remains and largely we see that one strand of thought is that it is rationalizing. What it is doing is it is rationalizing and on the other, it is also fundamentally depoliticizing at the same time. the other stand argues against the commodification of politics. There is a star, for example, that star decides to feature in one of the political rallies. This is where the commodification of politics begins because of the star's stature, because of the kind of activism, because of the celebrity tag that person has or the fan following, ultimately it will become part and parcel of the political agenda as well and they will garner votes. other strands as we just discussed as the commodification of politics there is also public shows with celebrities that evoke themes such as human rights and moral

authority and then they lend again to the larger political agendas. Democratization of public renown How is it happening? It is happening through celebrity activism, where you see they share ideological and political commitment with people around the world and enable communities of interest. communities of interest could be the political parties. That is called celebrity capital and influencer celebrification.

What is the celebrity capital? Basically, for their stature as a celebrity, they endorse brands and these brands pay them. first, the time that they're visible in the media is the celebrity capital. and through that, if they generate currency, that is the ultimate celebrity capital, which is adding to the celebrity capital. The influencer celebrification, how does it take place? there is an influencer who is known just for being an influencer, with no real talent. For example, the Kardashians, began as, just celebrities. What kind of celebrities? No one knows. What is the real work? What do they do? For example, a lot of influencers nowadays are turning into celebrities. How is this happening? The digital age has given everyone, individuals, especially a new pathway to not take the traditional way to become a celebrity.

But there are different ways through media attention that can lead to promotional endeavours. Advertisements and through this social cultural currency referred to as celebrity capital, you get endorsements. Traditional celebrities do not require any form of endorsement. But because they are celebrities, the companies often want a face for their brand and they associate brands, certain brands with certain faces. But with influencers, that is not the case. and through this, they can generate currency. But it is difficult for influencers to generate currency through celebrity capital they have the celebrity capital they uh this celebrification of influences is happening having through uh celebrity cult uh celebrity capital but when we witness when we try to analyze these aspects it becomes a little difficult difficult in the sense that the thin line that remains between the traditional capital, traditional celebrity capital and the influencers.

Celebrification is getting thinner and thinner day by day, research on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements focuses primarily on celebrities who have garnered celebrity capital through institutional intermediaries. , what are these institutional immediate trees? These institutional immediate trees are basically through sports, television, music and maybe others, which means in

contrast, social media influencers, don't have such kind of institutional immediacies.

What they do is collaborate that is how they, turn their culture, their celebrity capital into endorsements, to currency. Therefore Khamis, Ang and Welling have tried to study the effectiveness and the fluctuations of endorsement, like how streamlined or in a pipeline they have the endorsements. How often do they get these endorsements?

That is how they check the effectiveness and the endorsement the traditional celebrity fame is sticking upon the personal achievement as a sports person, as an actor, etc. Influencer fame has to do with or is interwoven with endorsement activities. These social media influencers do hauls, they do product reviews, and that is how they get paid partnerships with brands. The other way that we witness in advertising industries is that celebrities are both commodities and labourers or both messages and messengers. In a way, they are promoting brand awareness by harnessing their power over the media, and they're over the people. Dyer, Jameson and Marshall believe that celebrities are not born, but they are produced. They are socially produced. It is true because of social media, every day we see a new celebrity coming up and the line of demarcation is diminishing between traditional celebrities and social media celebrities. The product value of the celebrity lines lies in the ability to attract widespread attention. what is the product value of a product? It lies in the attention it gets. It depends on how much attention the celebrity can bring in. A different definition of celebrity capital is; accumulated media visibility through recurring media representations or broadly as recognizability for example, it's not just the time that you get in social media or the paparazzi or the journalists, but it is also being recognizable. You going on a trip and who recognizes you or no one recognizes you that is relevant to celebrity capital if you are famous on social media but when you go outside and no one recognizes you, your celebrity capital is not worth it, that is the analysis that is the analogy and that is what is studied in celebrity studies, these influencers try to mirror the traditional celebrities (actors). What these influencers do is mimic the characters from films, basically, but they add what is unique to them. And that helps them to garner the interest of the target audience. So, people who are fans of those traditional celebrities, when these social media influences are mimicking them or making videos of them it is liked not just by their followers and fans, but

also by the fans and followers of the real traditional celebrity. However, traditional celebrity is bound by highly controlled and curated media landscapes, which is not the case with social media stars. They are not bound by the traditional brokers of celebrity attention and that is giving rise to influencers. Influencers, cultivate as much attention as possible to be able to generate celebrity capital in the process celebrification or the production and reproduction of celebrity is what they are catering to. This is what they intend to do. In celebrity and media studies, we observe that the celebrification process suggests celebrification encompassing the mediated interplay and negotiations between celebrities.

There is mediated interplay and negotiation happening between celebrities, their management and various media platforms. This is all required in a way to undergo the process of celebrification. Celebrity capital can be gained and lost. There is something called decelerification that can happen, and it is a process.

It is not a status rather the traditional celebrities are the gatekeepers of media visibility. They endorse things like red carpet, paparazzi, brands, advertisement endorsements, etc. Whereas the social media influences do not require it. The new media landscape provides ample opportunities for attention. They use, everyday people to acquire celebrity capital, there are a lot of opportunities available for the influencers to manage to get attention. It is about the access, construction of authenticity and consumable persona and these characteristics of celebrification in the digital age we see have become very inaccessible. The construction of authenticity is questionable.

What is proxy celebrity capital? When a meme is circulating and the meme has not been uploaded by the person to whom it belongs or it's not the person who intended to put it on social media to become, viral. But on the contrary, someone else uploaded it is called proxy celebrity capital or the fame they get overnight also subsides after a point of time. They are not able to encash or generate currency out of this proxy celebrity capital or the little fame that they got for the initial amount of time that is why it is called proxy capital, proxy celebrity capital. This celebrity is no longer a binary. It has become a continuum. and there are various platforms. and what these influencers, social influencers are doing is they are making a crossover between Instagram famous, YouTube famous, and Twitter famous.



One person cannot just be famous on YouTube, Instagram or Twitter. They are crossing over. They are making the content available on all platforms. and this is how they are building their own pathway towards celebrification. and it is also in a way increasing diversity through overlapping many platforms that have emerged like TikTok, which is banned in India. Then Facebook. Facebook is largely an advertisement app. There was a Vine, which had been eradicated. These apps or platforms also experiment in many ways. It has evolved with time, and it is, producing on-demand content as well. These influencers and advertising practitioners have navigated this complex digital landscape. These platforms that we are using are a very complex digital landscape. and to fathom this is extremely important. People use social media to transform from micro-celebrities to influencers and highly branded social media stars. These highly branded social media stars have become important in social media. They have become branded just like traditional celebrities because they have become famous. They have become their brand.

They have become a brand in themselves. Influencer celebification, as we see it, is defined as the process by which social media influencers acquire celebrity capital. This has also already been discussed. How the celebrity ecology, which includes everything from advertisements to social media and the interconnectedness brings in the influencers, celebrification or lets it happen.

The three types of practices. One is Generative practice. The other is collaborative practice. And lastly, evaluative practice, a summarized way. The first, which is the generative practice, says that it influences the acquisition of celebrity capital. Influencers work tirelessly to build their following. That is attention labour. and then they develop niche content that can extend beyond a single platform. The generative practice is a way that they acquire celebrity capital through, being more in these media platforms and are making their content in such a way that it can be cross-distributed. It should not be linear. and the content is niche, new and refreshing, which has not been created yet. Then there are advertising industry practitioners, who act as talent scouts, and they bring in these influencers to have collaboration or paid partnerships for their brands.

The second is the collaborative practice. This collaborative practice expands the influencer's acquisition of celebrity capital by deepening connections between

influencers, fans and the advertising industry. to enrich the relationship and to be in the domain of celebrity capital, they have meetups with the fans, they go live, and they use other modes and devices to become very relevant to the people who are following.

They also at times collaborate with other social media influencers. and it is like patting at each other's back. Here, advertising industry practitioners act as a creative whole in the influencers' celebrification process, leveraging unexpected opportunities for the influencers. and the third, which is the evaluative practice and evaluative practice It acquires the celebrity capital by placing valuation.

What is the value of a celebrity or influencer? How they are, delivering meaning to the promotional value of a brand or product. it equates with the brand value of an influencer to the brand value of the product. these influencers are appraised based on their ability to gain online community. buy-in for a brand partner, and evaluated by the reach of their content across porous social media borders.

Here, the advertising industry practitioner's impact analysis influences celebrification process, assessing and influencing relevance and potential for success. It is determined by the product or the brand that they are endorsing and how many people are buying the product. How many people are using the coupon code? How many people are using the discounts of so-and-so influencers? That is what determines the effectiveness of the influencer and that is what brings relevance and potential success for them.