

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture20

Celebrity Studies and Indian Cinema

As a continuation to celebrity studies, we will be talking about celebrity studies in Hindi cinema or largely in the domain of Indian cinema because it attaches to itself the regional stars who have ventured into the celebrity culture or have crossed the boundary of celebification. Hindi cinema, if we see it as the largest producer of films has built a celebrity ecology that consists of media construction consumer spectacle and power and these all nurture something that is challenging the gender caste of the nation and the individual, Bollywood stars have been displaying something called cinematic populism. S.V. Srinivasan has studied this cinematic populism through Mr. Chiranjeevi, a renowned Telugu star. , in cinematic populism, it is seen that there is a merger happening between what is called as off-screen, character and online character. how it is displayed on screen and how they perform off-screen. They are merged and we see that it is particularly true in the first generation of the actors' turned politicians.

For example, M.G. Ramachandran, Miss Jaya Lalita and of course Chiranjeevi. Many actors of the 1950s and 70s, especially in the South Indian film industry, have portrayed the role of gods and these gods, on-screen presence has influenced their off-screen presence as well. People like N.T. Ramarao, who has played the role of Tirupati Balaji. Then there is Shivaji Ganesan playing the role of Lord Shiva. and then there is Arun Govil, who featured as Ram in the epic serial Ramayana, directed by Ramanand Sagar. These film stars have their fan clubs, and it is a key component to keep up with the social mobility, class and caste identities and the campaigning that comes along with politics and the elections. The visual rhetoric is layered with these celebrities such as human and divine. these layers come up together. For example, we have Miss Jaya Lalita, the crossover being evident. She was seen as her party and her stardom was seen as a cult.

Her followers were seen as a cult. It's a prime example of cinematic populism. Again, when we see the enabling of crossover into politics, they take their fans from cinema to politics. recent trends of celebrity activism constitute another layer of something called celebrityhood in India and this celebrityhood in Bollywood catches attention because Bollywood star's humanitarian activism in the recent past has enabled global citizenship for the celebs. It is helping and enabling them to do more humanitarian activism. For example, Priyanka Chopra, who recently was ambassador to UNICEF. and it is new due to the involvement of mass media, paparazzi, pages of Instagram and the channels that are coming along with it. Then there is something called Bollywood iconography.

Anyways, iconography in cinema is important. How the image formation of a person or an individual takes place. The villains in the films are to amplify the hero and the heroic that is coming out of the hero. Otherwise, the role of the villain is not much other than pushing the narrative of the story ahead. Part of this celebrity appeal in Bollywood stems from this iconography and it needs to be investigated to see if any social codes or cultural imaginaries are being constructed in defining the good or the evil or tolerable deviance if we can see or if we are investigating it, some many women actors or celebrities have made an impact without the support of the male. For example, Jaya Lalita in politics. But otherwise, when we are talking about making an impact through social reform or activism, the growth has been immense. There are actresses like Rani Mukherjee in No One Killed Jessica, which is based on Jessica Lal murder case. Then there is Madhuri Dixit, the film called Gulab Gang. Then there is Kangana Ranawat in Queen and Vidya Balan in Kahani. they have contributed immensely to empowering women's roles. They are, not confining themselves to patriarchy and they do not need support from a male star or a list of male stars to push their film or push, the role that they had played. We can see a systemic resistance has been coming up through the portrayal of such empowered women roles and it makes us conclude that the time or celebrification for especially women is changing. They are garnering a different celebrity capital for themselves, women empowerment as an idea is a cele-memes is one.

Cele-memes come from celebrities and memes. There are a lot of memes that are let's say there are fan pages that are making memes, and these fans are engaging with these celebrities and celebs in a playful, eventful way. These memes are

transmissible across populations. It is a transformative tool. It can be used as a transformative tool. These memes emerge putative ideas of equality and women's rights, celebrity victim triggers, and cultural symptoms of protest. calling it for legislative action, campaign for social reform etc These cele-memes somehow in the contemporary tribe are driving collectives like a group and they protest on various women's issues. These fan pages are the reasons that we see it more often happening, Ms. Mayavati, who was a Dalit and the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, praised Phoolan Devi for the militancy. The massive social media campaigns for Jessica Lal murder or the 2012 rape case are immense. These are the points where we integrate the Cele-meme culture, and we see the effects have been largely productive.

These cele-memes we see are presenting or representing this collective aspiration. This collective aspiration serves as cultural instruction and frame of interpretation for various women-centred issues, including the representation of women and Hindi cinema. Since it is beginning from the industry, we in a roundabout manner again go back other than representing the women's issues largely it is again questioning the representation women have in Hindi cinema and Telugu cinema for instance. Star celebrity representation, which, is a collective of aspirations, is a collective of despair and serves as a cultural instruction. and through these cultural instructions, there comes a stockpile of representations. and these representations are sets of images, images-making devices coming from books, collections, cultural storehouses, etc. What is important to note is that Stephen Greenblatt in *Marvelous Possessions* terms something called mimetic capital.

What is this mimetic capital and how it is generated? Mimetic capital can be banked upon because of various specific features of celebrity culture. Banking upon this idea of mimetic capital, someone is mimicking, an individual or a group is mimicking, generating memes and that becomes a capital. It acts as a celebrity capital. Therefore, it is important to understand what mimetic capital might mean largely. Consequently, the aura and the enhancement, of the illusion around celebrity no longer require star presence as a corporeal reality. There are two types of entities. One is corporeal and the other one is cinematic.

But before that, these images generate capital gains. It can, be created often through media representations or fan cultures. and they generate capital like

economic and cultural capital, two kinds. and endless mimesis is at the heart of the process. The images can generate a lot of what we term as capital. These stars drop on the mimetically minded as models. They are called mimetic mind models they are called more objects of desire they are called fantasies because they are more than anything else they can they are in a way sensuous fidelity and their cinematic and public representations come from there. What is the sensuous fidelity that largely addresses the representation in the cinema has largely seen, there are advertisements, there are biopics, and autobiographies, which are drawn from images of the star.

For example, Salman Khan was part and parcel of the ad Thumbs Up till 2016 and then came Ranbir Singh. He took over from Salman Khan. the ad of this particular advertisement of Thumbs Up is more action and therefore Salman Khan is best suited he has been doing films like Dabang, and Dabang 2 with a lot of heroic action around his character and he can be seen to be best suited for this particular image of the star with the image of the star. Even though the audience knows what is corporeal and what is cinematic, what is the difference between the two? It's not real. They know that there are body doubles who are performing these actions. But even then, they are readily believing in the aura that the superstar creates. and then we see that as in the case of all celebrity culture, the charisma of the star is made available through the circulation of various devices, such as hairstyles, clothing, posters, interviews and other cultural apparatuses.

For example, hairstyle, certain stars are often known to change their hairstyles. and they are known for their hairstyles. Then there is clothing. when it comes to clothing, we have people like Mr Karan Johar and then again Ranveer Singh who dress in a different way as compared to the other celebrities, other male celebrities. Therefore, they are identified by the way they dress up.

Again, we have the posters and the interviews. Many people, how they do their interviews, are known by that. Over time, these adaptations drawing on the supposed magical nature of the hero ensure that the representation is heroic for all purposes what this means is that when they are adapting or drawing on this magical nature, they ensure that that representation of the heroic is retained. in all purposes, in all kinds of purposes that it's going to undergo or has undergone, they make it sure that it happens.

The magical nature is kept along with them. this, coming back to mimetic capital of films, advertisements and bioscopes, there's something called sensuous fidelity which is generated through advertisements, bioscopes, biopics, etc. and there's a condition between fidelity and fantasy, which we call as sensuous fidelity. Where the copy or mimetic version draws much power from the original, especially in the case of biopics. in the biopics, you see, they are drawing the power from the original. Mimetic is like you're just mimicking in a way, right? the mimetic version is drawing from the original and making it like, powerful, like the original itself.

For example, in Bhaag Milka Bhaag, we had not anticipated Farhan Akhtar to play the role of Milka Singh. Other film stars have portrayed, miraculously, especially in biopics, like especially the sports biopics, in the section of sports biopic. Then moving on to sensuous fidelity, it relies on two kinds of bodies. One is corporeal and the other is cinematic. and it is a hybrid of the two that circulates publicly. "It's not as though when there's a star, only a single version of their body—whether it be a fake or mimetic one—is in circulation. Instead, it's the cinematic aspect that circulates, particularly as a hybrid. This hybrid, a blend of the cinematic and the real, continues to circulate publicly, even when the actor appears in person. Even in reality, when the actor is physically present, the aura of this hybrid remains with them. "The aura or the mix or the hybridity of the corporeal and cinematic still exists along with them, there is generative of star charisma. there is something called charisma and this word has been used. used to display how the codes of morality have changed or changed for stars, for certain stars. For example, there is an actor called Mr. Sanjay Dutt and Sanjay Dutt had a biopic. The biopic was titled Sanju.

It was Yasir Usman's book; the biography of Sanjay Dutt and Ranbir Kapoor played the role of Sanju. there is something called infantilization happening in that book and it must do a lot with what we call as charisma or what we are referring to as charisma. Charisma cripples the ethics or what we call as the codes of morality Sanju infantilizes it and reduces an adult to childlike behaviour and charisma justifies the imperfections the stupidity the impulsive behaviour had it has been any other individual, not a personality people would have not designated them as not normal but that is not happening with Sanjay Dutt he's still being called as and referred to as Sanju baba which is quite shocking he's shown as supposed craziness crazy careless behaviour but that has been in a way, elevated, shown in the light of charisma, that since he has that charisma, it is okay for him to do these

unacceptable behaviours. He was charged with TADA TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act) and people made biographies on him to whitewash his associations with the underworld. and then there is this hypnotic spell that charisma creates. and through this hypnotic spell, we might say that morality is redefined. Through Sanju, we see that morality is being redefined.

Whatever is shown in the film is for the cleaning purpose of the image of Sanjay Dutt. He was a drug addict. He was a womanizer. He was involved with the underworld. But all these images of his have been produced in such a way to show that there are reasons for him to become what he became. These stars thrive on the gap between ideal and idealized. they are not idols and there is no idealism, but they have been idealized and they are thriving on that gap. just like Sanjay Dutt. We conclude celebrity cultures in Hindi cinema and state that this gap between the ideal and the idealized hero and the roles they enact in real life including gun ownership, violence, a mafia and involvement are somehow justified.