

Evolution of Indian Cinema and Its Impact on Indian Culture: Bollywood and Tollywood as Cases in Point

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ABSTRACT

Indian cinema has greatly contributed to the globalisation of Indian culture, the world of cinema has seen many changes, this paper will shed some light on the societal impact of Indian cinema. Owing to the enhancement of technology and creativity, cinema has been a major influence on people's world views and perspectives. By examining major Bollywood and Tollywood films, this paper will analyse how Indian cinema has affected the course of Indian history. Moreover, the paper presents what changes have occurred in the opinions of the masses as a result of cinema's impact on Indian culture and society.

Introduction

The Indian film industry is one of the largest and most vibrant in the world, with almost 1500 to 2000 films made each year. It is estimated that more than 12 million people watch these films every day, making Indian cinema one of the biggest box offices in the world. Approximately one in every five films is made in India. The diversity of its culture and the rich history of its people is one of the reasons its films have gained a global reputation throughout the world. With about \$160 million worldwide, RRR, a Telugu epic film about two revolutionaries fighting against the British Raj, broke the record for the highest opening day earnings for any Indian film ever made. It is the third highest grossing Indian film of all time and broke the record for the highest opening-day earnings for an Indian film. During the past few decades, Bollywood movies have gained a tremendous amount of popularity and the methods used for making them have evolved too. Despite the fact that the Indian film industry consists of many languages and is rich in culture, many of the films have included the diverse indigenous Indian culture and history as part of the films that they have made. About 800 to 1000 films are produced by it every year, and as a result it effortlessly earns about Rs 100 crore every year. At Rs 528 crore (£52.8m), Dhoom 3 (2013) holds the title of the highest grossing Bollywood movie of all time. Approximately \$100 billion is predicted to be generated by the industry in the next ten years. This paper will explore Indian cinema pre independence and investigate Films in post-independence India and contemporary India. Finally Impact of cinema on Indian culture will be investigated.

Indian Cinema Pre-independence

Prior to independence from the British Empire, the Indian film industry was essentially focused towards the working class, and it primarily featured themes of joy, love, and amusement to create a distraction from the ongoing difficulties by finding comfort in the medium of films.

The first film in India was a silent film and was displayed at the Watson hotel in Mumbai on the 17th of July, 1896. Raja Harishchandra is the first full-length Indian feature film made during the silent era. The film was released in 1913 and is said to be the work of a director who is considered the father of the Indian movie industry, Dhundiraj Govind Phalke (*CHAPTER -2 a BRIEF HISTORY of INDIAN CINEMA*, n.d.). The mythological texts of Hinduism are usually the subject of most films. Although there was a general belief, especially among the working class, that acting and acting caste were discreditable, especially among females, because of its association with a loss of virtue and respectability, a great deal of female characters had male actors portraying them.

The British Raj heavily imposed media censorship to prevent the spread of nationalism, in hope of restricting rebellions and in order to maintain control over the subcontinent. First ever movie to be banned in India was 'Bhakti Vidur', which was banned in 1921(Pezarkar, 2017). The silent film based on a Mahabharata character, Vidur, reportedly portrayed Mahatma Gandhi's behaviour, and had been claimed to be an imitation of him(Pezarkar, 2017). A number of films depicting any kind of rebellion against the British empire were later banned by the British government(Pezarkar, 2017). 'Raitu bidda', a Telugu melodramatic film, is an example of this kind of film. An important part of the narrative of this film is the portrayal of the revolt against the zamindar system during the period of British rule in India. In spite of the fact that the movie was banned, many Indians still embraced nationalism because of it. It is important to note that during the period immediately preceding the liberation of India, films played a large role in transmitting and bringing together the national revolt against the British Empire.

In 1946, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas made the film Dharti Ke Lal, which focuses on the famine in Bengal in 1943, and depicts details of the tragedy ("Dharti Ke Lal (1946)," n.d.). There were approximately three million civilians that died as a result of this famine in Bengal alone ("Bengal Famine of 1943 | Cause, Description, & Facts | Britannica," n.d.). It was a film that was recognized and widely distributed throughout the Soviet Union (USSR) as the first of its kind to be recognized internationally. In the history of Indian cinema, Neecha Nagar was the first film to win an award on an international scale ("Chetan Anand's Neecha Nagar Was First Indian Film to Win at Cannes 75 Years Ago but We Bet You Have Never Seen It," 2022). Throughout this film, there were elements of social discrimination and classism in the Indian society that were explored. This film won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1946. Kisan Kanya then went on to become the first colour film made by Moti Gidwani in 1937.

Films in Post-independence India and Contemporary India

Bollywood films were considered to be at their peak from the 1950s until the late 1970s during the golden age of Bollywood cinema (*Golden Age of Indian Cinema | AIDCSC*). In the post-independence era, themes of patriotism were emphasised, especially the revolt against the British empire, as well as themes of nationalism. A large majority of the films made in the 60s, 70s, and 80s were dominated by male actors. As can be seen in many of these films, the lead protagonist often played a strong male character, who was often painted as a hero who defeated the villain in the film. Most often, the women in the movies are either the love interests of the heroes or the damsels in distress who are rescued by them in the end. In the golden age of Bollywood, many classic Bollywood movies were made, including blockbusters like Mother India and Pyaasa, which were considered the pinnacle of Bollywood film making.

Throughout the years, there have been several independent filmmakers who have left their mark by adding twists and turns to the familiar plots of Bollywood films such as Mehboob Khan, Raj Kapoor, and Guru Dutt. A variety of social realities were often shown in their works, such as the struggles of the urban working class. The number of films that were made around 1947 almost doubled from 126 films produced in 1944 up to almost 283 films as a result of the lifting of the film restriction. Most of these films were made in Bombay. Since the partition of Bengal in 1947, the majority of Bollywood movies have migrated from Kolkata to Mumbai, which has now become the new hotspot for Bollywood films. The addition of music to film added a new aesthetic to the industry, the melodies in the movie played a major role in the popularity of Bollywood films.

Do Bigha Zameen, Sujata, and Boot Polish are some examples of the Bollywood films produced during the early golden era in India. The story of Do Bigha Zameen illustrates the way in which the rich exploit the lower classes. 'Sujata' (1959) is a film about a beautiful untouchable orphan falling in love with a brahmin boy. The story depicts how they must deal with social backlash resulting from their love story. Boot polish is a film about the struggles of two orphan kids navigating their way through life while dodging problems ("Golden Age of Indian Cinema | AIDCSC," 2018).

The 1980's were the decade where quite a few female directors emerged such as Meera Nair and Aparna Sen who were internationally recognized(Paul, 2015). A recent film Gully Boy was a massive hit and was directed by Zoya Akhtar. Women were faced with tough times when they chose the career of filmmaking in India. Another fuelling

factor was that men working under the woman while shooting a film were often reluctant to accept the women as a superior.

The blockbuster *Sholay* directed by Ramesh Sippy broke several box office records in India, making Amitabh Bachan one of the most successful actors in the world (Paul, 2015). The introduction of the new generation of actors like Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Madhuri Dixit and Chiranjeevi in the 1990s further elevated the Indian film industry as these new actors brought with them a new style and techniques to the silver screen (Paul, 2015). The music industry and the film industry go hand in hand, Bollywood is filled with melodious tunes complemented with swift yet elegant dances. These musicals took place in scenic destinations or during a vibrant celebration.

Impact of Cinema on Culture

As a reflection of society, film can serve as a way for us to mirror the issues that we face daily. It is not just a medium for engaging the masses - it also serves as a method for exchanging and influencing information with a wider audience. The impact of cinema is phenomenal as it reaches every corner of the globe. The majority of the world's population has seen a movie, so it is one of the easiest ways to influence the public in a positive way. For example, as part of Adolf Hitler's soft power strategy of manipulating the masses, Hitler made use of movies as propaganda during World War 2 ("How Media 'Fluff' Helped Hitler Rise to Power," n.d.).

It has been proven that film is one of the most effective ways to convey a message to people. For instance, during the 1930s (pre-independence), India experienced a rough patch during which it experienced economic and social reforms, as well as the struggle to gain independence from the British. Whenever there is a need to ignite a sense of patriotism and to get out a message to the public, films are the best way to do so. *Jhansi Ki Rani* is a film that depicts the life of the Queen of Jhansi who actively participated in the revolt against the British empire, this film portrays female empowerment as well as the patriotic struggle for independence.

The way India dresses has also been heavily influenced by the movie industry. Bollywood film industries display a large amount of fashion as part of their marketing strategy for their films. The majority of outfits that are shown in movies are immediately introduced on the market as the demand for such designs is high. A tailor reproduces the costumes adorned by the actors and actresses in the movie and the dress designs are titled according to what the character or the movie is all about. A well-known example of this is the *Jodha-Akbar* jewellery set.

With the advent of social themes and issues being portrayed more and more in Bollywood films over the years, this genre of Bollywood film has evolved. The increase in biopics and historical films in the past decade has moved audiences' perspective from accepting the perpetual way of filmmaking to exploring their culture and educating themselves about their history and society. Some films such as *Major* (2022) portray emphasis on the Mumbai attacks in 2008 and a Biopic such as *M.S. Dhoni* describes the hardships and triumphs that the distinguished cricketer was faced with along his journey towards success. Some films display the societal conflicts as well such as "*Maqbool*" (2003), about the mafia in Bombay and Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday* (2004) about the Bombay blasts and communal rioting in the city between Hindus and Muslims (Welle (www.dw.com), n.d.).

As with any modern-day film industry, the evolution of Indian cinema also had a great deal to do with foreign filmmaking industries, particularly those of Hollywood. The inclusivity of Hollywood into Indian cinema has influenced the masses into adapting themselves to such a culture and being attracted to such a state.

Movies have also notably evolved to better represent women and their issues. A rise in feminism has helped in the education and spread of awareness about women's rights. Many world issues can be showcased in these films such as societal standards for women, gender inequality, women's health etc. *Gangubai*, a Bollywood film is a biography which opens up an interesting discussion regarding the ostracization of sex workers and the struggle for women's rights in the movie. Representation of such ideas helps shape the future and tunes the upcoming generation's mind by providing them a broader perspective on how the world works.

Conclusion

A movie is a powerful tool for educating the world about a culture. They portray the past, present, and at times even influence the future. By displaying contemporary issues through a descriptive narrative, movies are often able to shed light on issues that are both undervalued and unknown, and sometimes are not given as much consideration by the community as they should. Film has also been a powerful medium of communication with the people. The projection of certain ideals greatly influenced the public, this proves that cinema is not only a mere source of entertainment, but it also has the undisputed potential to shape and change the society's perspectives.

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