

Film-A Medium of Mass Communication-Bringing Social Change

Prof (Dr) Raghunath Datta

[Pro-Chancellor (Academic) Seacom Skills University West Bengal]

Rohit Ganguly

[Research Scholar (Seacom Skills University West Bengal)]

Abstract- Films are rollercoaster ride that have the tremendous power to entertain and to teach. They can be a powerful tool to bring about effective social change . It seems intuitive and logical that a well-made film- especially one with a compelling narrative and well-crafted outreach plan would serve as a catalyst to change minds, encourage viewers to change entrenched behaviors, and start inform or reenergize social movements.

Keywords: Films, Documentary Films, Social Awareness, Public Impact

Introduction

Films play an important role in shaping our thoughts, emotions and attitudes toward the needs of our age. They contribute to our awareness of global issues, create empathy for the underrepresented or oppressed, explore cultural values, help us heal from difficult circumstances, and evolve our visual literacy, aesthetic appreciation, and cross-cultural understanding.

Public Awareness

The public's interest and concern with global events and economic, environmental and social problems are growing and public awareness of global changes is increasing; the public starts to perceive that every individual is capable of contributing to resolution of global problems. However, provision of information on development cooperation issues to the public remains relevant as an integral part of Lithuanian development cooperation policy.

Social Development

Social Development encompasses a commitment to individual and societal well-being, and the opportunity for citizens to determine their own and their society's needs and to influence decisions that affect these. Social change incorporates public concerns in developing social policy and economic initiatives.

Film as a Mass Medium-

Film is a means of creative expression. It performs the functions of mass media. Such as information, education, entertainment and transmission of culture. Films are widely popular and their audio visual nature provides them a pervasive power for social influence.

Therefore, they have the potential to play an important role as a medium of entertainment, information and education and as a catalyst for social change. Films are popular because they entertain.

They are a facet of a mass culture and mass art. They generate mass mediated culture arising from elite, folk, popular or mass origins.

Cinema –Promoting Social Change

Cinema is a powerful medium. It speaks with the language of universality. Cinema through story-telling, documentary, realism or fiction through its very nature demands a universal language. By accessing and understanding what makes a universal issue, the audiences can better engage with the world around them. Films represent and at the same time signify. They remix the real, the unreal, the present, real life, memory, and dream on the same shared mental level.

However, other than being a very important means of entertainment and regaling the audience, cinema has played a significant role to bring about social changes.

Indian cinema has seen a great transformation since the early nineteen-thirties. The 1930's saw the emergence of three big banners in Indian cinema- Prabhat, Bombay Talkies and New Theatres. The first Indian talkie – *Alam Ara* – was released on March 14, 1931. After that, there was no turning back. Directed by Ardeshir Irani, it was the first Indian film with sound.

During the same period, South India saw the release of two talkies- *Bhakta Prahlada* in Telugu and *Kalidas* in Tamil. Following the release of these movies was the till-date-famous *Devdas*.

During the 1940s cinema in South India accounted for nearly half of India's cinema halls and cinema came to be viewed as an instrument of cultural revival. The late 1940's also saw the commencement of the "Golden Age of Indian Cinema". The "Golden Age" was from late 1940's to 1960's.

Mehboob Khan's *Mother India* dealt with several social issues. It was one of the earliest films that were women centric. It became a landmark in Hindi cinema. Released in 1957, it brought the character of mother at the centre-stage in Hindi films. It was also nominated as an Oscar for the best foreign language film.

While commercial cinema was thriving, the same age saw the emergence of a new Parallel Cinema movement mainly led by Bengali cinema. It was the cinema of social significance and artistic sincerity, presenting a modern, humanist perspective in contrast to the fantasy world of the popular cinema.

During the 1960's, popular cinema shifted its social concerns towards more romantic genres. This period also became prominent for a more assertive Indian nationalism. *Mughal-e-Azam* carved a niche for itself because of its panache.

There was also an introduction of Comedy of Errors. For the first time, the double role of an actor was introduced by the movie *Ram aur Shyam*. Later a lot of similar films were made. These include *Sita aur Geeta* and *Duplicate*.

Following the Indo-Pakistan wars in 1962 and 1965, the Indian officer came to be a rallying point for the national imagination. Old films such as *Aradhana*, *Sangam*, and newer ones like *Main Hoon Na* and *Mausam* highlight this.

The 1970's were an introduction to young romance. The movie *Bobby* brought forward teenage love. This era was also a time for action flicks, the most loved one perhaps being *Sholay*. At the same time, devotional films were given importance. *Jai Santoshi Ma* is a devotional classic released in 1975.

It was in the late 1970's that Yash Chopra's film *Kala Patthar* released. It focuses on the pitiable and dangerous lives of the coal miners. This movie too sees the characters fight for social justice. It was Mahesh Bhatt's film *Arth* that put a bold theme before the yet reserved audience. The big screen was familiarized with the idea of extra marital affair.

South India's Malayalam cinema of Kerala, regarded as one of the best Indian film genres, experienced its own "Golden Era" during the 1980's and 1990's.

In the late 1990s, 'Parallel Cinema' began experiencing resurgence in Hindi cinema, largely due to the critical and commercial success of *Satya*, a low-budget film released in 1998. It was based on the Mumbai underworld, directed by Ram Gopal Varma.

The new millennium started with the controversy generated by the filming of Deepa Mehta's last of the Trilogy Water, which was based on the life of Hindu widows in the 1930's. The years that followed saw movies like Rang De Basanti and No One Killed Jessica that not only popularized the concept of candle march, but also encouraged the audience to stand up against crime and in favour of justice. The famous movie 3 Idiots changed the way students looked at marks.

It is a matter of pride that, Indian cinema has not only remained popular in India, but it has increased its boundaries elsewhere in world. It is really encouraging to see a 'double bottom-line' production house in India. Movies are a really powerful medium in India.

Documentary Film-An Integral Tool of Social Awareness

Documentary films can educate, raise awareness, and inspire change like few other forms of media. In a world where visual media dominates and social media is the channel through which we communicate, there is no better tool for changing hearts and minds than the feature-length documentary film. From financial contributions to being a dedicated audience member, there are many ways to support documentary films and the countless important stories just waiting to be told; information on all of which can be found in this guide. All that's needed is the belief in the power of story to inspire social change.

In recent years, independently produced documentaries have become one of the chief ways through which we gain an in depth understanding of our world, the challenges we face, and the potential solutions to solving them. In particular, films that highlight social issues have become, in our time, the lens through which we see our world, and the tools through which we seek to change.

Impact of Documentary: Promoting Social Change through Story Telling

The notion of “impact” is suddenly everywhere, trending across many fields, not just documentary filmmaking. In the past few years the terms “impact space” and “impact producing” have been coined by a leading organization in this space, the UK’s BRITDOC, and taken up across the field to name the burgeoning practice of coupling social issue documentary films with outreach, impact and engagement strategies designed to have specific social change outcomes.

Documentary Films: A Tool of Social Change and Movement

Media plays a significant role in the society. It bridges the gap between the sender and the receiver of a message. It mirrors the society and acts as a catalyst of change.

Media has the power to show reality by revealing untold stories; in this regard documentary films have a major task. They highlight various aspects of a society. Films promise to entertain, inform and educate which is why they have a mass appeal. Feature films entertain the masses whereas documentaries showcase reality to bring about social change. They equip the masses with information on human behavior, historical contexts, conflicts and issues existing in the social order.

Documentaries have power to give light to the struggles and problems that exist in a culture fabric. It often gives voice to people whose voices might otherwise be silenced. To evoke human consciousness, issues need to be presented in a simple manner. Films have the power to mobilise the audience around that particular cause. Nonfiction films have power of persuasion, introspection and questioning, which are essential for a cultural transformation and most importantly films address different causes which impact our lives. Documentary films in particular aim at capturing the truth. It helps in portraying the objectivity behind the scene.

Even government has realised the power of this medium to highlight the problems of deprived and neglected. In this regard Film Division has also proposed a scheme to produce films “for public information, education and motivation and for institutional and cultural purposes.” These films can provide fresh prospective to different aspect of problems existing in society. These films try to serve as a positive catalyst of social change and provide a different angle to look at the social aspects of different cultures across the country. These films bring socio- economic – cultural problems into the open for wider discussion and until and unless these issues are not surfaced, they will never be resolved.

Film making is an art and in today’s global world with the coming up of digital technology the young blood is venturing in this field enthusiastically but the major hindrance a film maker can face is lack of infrastructure and economic restrictions, not many

filmmakers will try to generate fresh avenues for such issues to get highlighted. This is the right time that the policy makers should realize the impact of this medium because the overall progress of a country depends on knowledge and awareness among its citizens.

Conclusion

Movies have been a platform for entertainment since their inception, serving as an escape from reality and a dive into a new world on the big screen. They are also an influence on the inner workings of society and culture. According to historymatters.gmu.edu, "Film can be viewed as a social and cultural history," examining the lives of the people through the scope of a lens. Movies are not just to entertain, but also can serve to educate and bring about social awareness on issues of the day, on history or on any other subject.

References

1. <http://www.indianyouth.net/films-effective-medium-inculcate-awareness-among-youth/>
2. www.researchgate.net/journal/1750-3280_Studies_in_Documentary_Film
3. https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1061&context=educ_hess_etds
4. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/film-studies/indian-cinema-and-its-impact-on-society-film-studies-essay.php>
5. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/film-studies/influence-of-movies-to-society-film-studies-essay.php#>
6. <https://www.rifemagazine.co.uk/2016/05/influence-and-appreciation-of-film-in-todays-society/>
7. <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2010/06/movies-and-the-role-they-play/>
8. <https://platt.edu/blog/film-society-films-impact-society-popular-culture/>
9. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/oct/06/documentaries-puma-creative-impact-award>
10. <https://www.iucn.org/content/science-and-cinema-raising-environmental-awareness-using-film>
11. <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2017/vivacity/films-create-awareness.html>
12. <https://bahaiteachings.org/film-as-an-impetus-for-social-awareness-and-change>
13. <https://www.newsclick.in/india/film-medium-social-change>
14. <https://prezi.com/ypnahrzw9bj3/role-of-cinema-in-social-awareness/>
15. <https://qrius.com/cinema-medium-social-change/>
16. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1370662/films-important-medium-communication-shabana-azmi/>
17. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2575832?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
18. <https://www.newsclick.in/india/film-medium-social-change>
19. <http://www.preservearticles.com/2012011821119/short-essay-on-film-as-mass-medium.html>
20. <http://generationfoundfilm.com/2016/10/24/6-reasons-host-community-screening-generation-found/>
21. <http://www.shareyouressays.com/english-essays/1059-words-essay-on-cinema%E2%80%94its-uses-and-abuses/3135>
22. https://www.academia.edu/3502193/Alternative_Cinema_A_tool_for_creating_social_awareness
23. <https://orangeprojects.lt/en/activities/public-awareness>
24. <http://worldanimal.net/our-programs/strategic-advocacy-course-new/module-1/social-change/social-development-change>
25. <https://www.jackizehner.com/resources/film-as-a-tool-for-social-change/>