Present Day Bollywood Cinema and the Audience's Preferences

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Abstract

The primary objective of this research paper is to highlight and inspect the present day Bollywood cinema (Hindi cinema), and to study the audience it caters to, in order to find out the preferences of the audience that indirectly lead to the culmination of the standard that the Bollywood industry follows.

Keywords: Bollywood Industry, Audience's Preferences.

Introduction

The study of the present day Hindi cinema in India is a qualitative study based on the review of previously published literature related to the subject. The main aim of this study is to establish a general opinion on the current state of the Bollywood film industry of India. Recognizing the preferences of the audience that Hindi films cater to is also an aim the study is desired to fulfil.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyse the present state of Bollywood: the trends and type of films which constitute majority of the industry, and to find how the society comprising of the primary audience, affects the films that are made for their entertainment consumption. The methodology followed is the review of literature from previous researches and deriving opinions based on the study of literature.

The Current Scenario

Present day Bollywood cinema is marked with light entertainment movies, serious drama on social issues and patriotic fervour. Unlike 60's, there are no serious tragedies and no preaching on values and ethics. Though movies like 'Aligarh' touches very distinct theme on homosexuality, 'Citylights' portraits poverty and helplessness of a simple couple who moved from a small town in Rajasthan to the glamorous city of lights Mumbai, and movie like 'Jodha Akbar' represents the royal and historical drama, we have light comic movies like 'Golmaal' and its sequels, 'Welcome' and 'Hera Pheri'. While 'Jindagi Na Milegi Dobara' introduces us to unburden ourselves from the stressful attitude, 'Happy New Year' conveys a serious message through imprudent comedy acts. 'Dilwale' is a mock drama of crime and suspense, love and romance.

It was from the 1990's itself that more emphasis was being given to the commercial and entertainment value of a film and less to its moral and ethical message (M K Raghavendra: 2013). In this background the decade of 2000's began with the contemporary versions of old classics such as 'Lagaan' (2001) and 'Devdas' (2002), both of which went on to become huge hits. The film 'Lagaan' was also India's official entry to the 2002 Oscars.

The beginning of the 21st century also brought with itself the first cycle of biopic in the Indian film culture which was mostly based on a revival of the historical genre. A biographical film or biopic is a film that dramatizes the life of an actual person or people. Until the early 2000's, there were very few biopics in mainstream Hindi cinema except probably the 1982 Indo-British co-production about the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi, titled 'Gandhi' (1982). Even in the 21st century, the trend continued and these type of films were mostly about the historical figures and national leaders including 'Ashoka' (2001), 'Bhagat Singh', an anti-colonial revolutionary whose story featured in the 2006 hit 'Rang de basanti' 'Mangal Pandey', a semi-legendary hero of the 1857 uprisings, featured in The Rising: Ballad of 'Mangal Pandey' (2005) and the great mughal Akbar, who was the subject of 'Jodha Akbar' (2008). The 21st century also saw the production of sequels i.e the continuation of the previous films such as 'Krish' (2006), 'Phir Hera Pheri' (2006), 'Lagey Raho Munna Bhai' (2006), 'Don' (2006) and 'Umraojaan' (2006).

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The early 21st century was a time of experimentation with various subjects and innovation, people no longer wanted to watch movies with the same story line, thus the filmmakers arrayed diverse movies such as social films like 'Baghban' (2003), love stories like 'Veer Zaara' (2004), patriotic films such as 'Rang de Basanti' (2006), 'Mangal Pandey' (2005), 'Swades' (2004); thrillers such as 'Murder' (2004) and comedy like 'Bunty aur Bubbly' (2005). It was also a time when literary masterpieces such as 'Pinjar' (2003), 'Parineeta' (2005), and 'Omkara' (2006) graced the celluloid. The time was also ripe for Technological advancement. This was just the beginning of the contemporary period of Hindi cinema and Hindi cinema was achieving new heights of excellence, the varied movies has proven that hindi cinema is now mature enough and has learnt to take risks.

With the films like 'Tare Zameen Par' (2007) and 'Chak de India' (2007) which contains no heroine, no romance, no sex, no violence and yet they have become blockbusters, the success itself is testimony to the fact that the Indian audience has changed and so is the Indian filmmaking process (M K Raghavendra: 2013). As the times further progressed, we realize that the Contemporary films have a better variety to offer. There is something for everyone. If one wants to enter into a dream like sequence with happy endings and a lot of glamour and grandeur one can always opt for the lively films made by Sooraj Barjatya, Aditya Chopra, and Karan Johar which represent candy floss entertainment at its best. If one wants to relive the good old days, one can opt for period films set in the retro era such as 'Barfi' (2012), 'Once Upon A Time in Mumbai' (2010) and 'The Dirty Picture' (2011). Other movies made in the 21st century but set in the 1980's are 'Special 26' (2013), 'Himmatwala' (2013) and 'Shootout at Wadala' (2013). If one is interested in historical dramas with special focus on costumes of the time one can go ahead with movies such as 'Veer' (2010) and 'Bajirao Mastani'.

The inclination towards remakes and biopics still remain a popular choice for several makers, but the biopics have shifted their concentration from the freedom fighters to the people who have achieved success in a particular field like business or entertainment or sports, some examples of the same can be 'Guru' (2007), 'Paan Singh Tomar' (2012), 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag' (2013) and 'Mary Kom' (2014). The one issue with biopics has been that they are often looked upon by the mainstream audiences as Documentary movies and thus devoid of any entertainment value. Tigmanshu Dhulia, who directed the biopic on the runner turned bandit 'Paan Singh Tomar' (2012) also pointed out that audiences would think that a biopic without stars would be classed as a documentary. All this shows the dynamism and vitality of the Indian cinema and its tremendous capacity to keep abreast of changes. It is because of these features that the Indian cinema influences the dominant urban culture in more ways than one. It exercises its influence on all other art forms such as television, theatre, advertising, music, information technology, journalism, architecture, fashion and even the profiles of goddesses on calendars and in Puja pandals.

The Multiplex Culture

In the contemporary period of Hindi Cinema there has been a recent transition to multiplex exhibition of films. The multiplex theatre is an exhibition space designed for multiple screenings. India's first multiplex, opened in New Delhi in 1997 and from then on the Multiplex sector in India has seen phenomenal growth especially over the last few years. The advent of Multiplexes has been like a hard blow to the single screens. The Multiplexes which generally open inside big Shopping malls seek a middle class audience primarily located in urban areas. India's multiplex screens are forecast to number more than 2,200 by 2016, according to the 2012 media and entertainment report by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) lobby group and consultancy KPMG. Multiplexes are also garnering a higher share of exhibition revenues from films, compared to standalone theatres. In 2010, multiplexes accounted for 21 per cent of film exhibition revenues while in 2011, they accounted for more than 30 per cent. As the multiplexes are entering deeper into smaller towns, it seems the single screens are losing the battle. With the rising young population, more and more people are attracted towards the multiplexes. The movie exhibition business is expected to rise to Rs 10,800 cr by 2016, increasing 9.5 per cent in the last five years. In the face of threats from Television and Internet, the Multiplexes have essentially been a key player in reinvigorating the theatrical market. The movie viewing experience in a multiplex has added a new dimension to urban leisure. Watching a movie in a multiplex located almost always in the middle of a shopping mall and in its lavish surroundings has altered the way in which people view movies. It has given both a social and economic push to the Movie watching market. In the coming times, Multiplexes are more likely to succeed than the single screens.

International film studios such as Warner Bros., Disney, Fox and Dream Works have entered collaborations with local film production houses to develop Hindi and regional movies. Walt Disney, who earlier held a 50 per cent stake in UTV, has now acquired a controlling stake in UTV Software Communications. Viacom18 has also entered a deal with global movie company Paramount Pictures to market and distribute the latter's movies in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It has already ventured into production of Hindi language movies, and the new deal is expected to help it create a distribution network. Local film production can leverage the experience of these international studios to expand their international reach and incorporate enhanced project planning and cost controls. A case in point is "My Name is Khan", which was distributed in unexplored markets. The growth of multiplexes has improved the movie-going experience for Indian audiences and has led to an increasein per-ticket realization. Rising urbanization and growing disposable incomes are also driving increased investments in multiplexes. In addition, theatres with

low seating capacities allow cost-effective screening of movies that are targeted at niche audiences. Companies such as Real Image and UFO Moviez have facilitated digitization of movies, which curbs piracy and enables increased release of films across the country — a game-changing phenomenon whereby 60 per cent of box-office collections are realized in the first week of release of a movie.

General Perception of Indian Cinema

It is a universal truth that cinema is a powerful reflector of society. It mirrors the transformations, cultural tensions and new trends that are surfacing in society in interesting ways. In short, cinema captures the essence of life itself. As the Cinema is changing so is the perception about cinema. A look at the history of the nation will reveal that when the films entered the nation not all were happy and rejoicing in the art form, there were many who looked upon it as a social evil capable of destroying young minds and corrupting them. Even, the father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi (bapu) viewed cinema as a corrupting influence, and could not envisage a role for it in the construction of a swadeshi culture. In the modern day India there would be very few who would shun cinema and label it as a social evil. On the other hand, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru recognized the potential of cinema from the very beginning itself and wanted to use the medium in a way which benefits the society. In a personal communication dispatched to the organizers of the first Indian motion picture congress in Bombay in 1939, he asserted:

"I am far from satisfied at the quality of work that has been done. Motion pictures have become an essential part of modern life and they can be used with greater advantage for educational purposes… so far greater stress has been laid on a type of film, which presumably is supposed to be entertaining, but the standard or quality of which is not high. I hope that the industry will consider now in terms of meeting the standards and of aiming at producing high-class films that have educational and social values. Such films should receive the cooperation and not only of the public but also of the state."

Thus, there were two ways in which the nationalist leadership approached cinema. First, as low art which aimed to provide vulgar entertainment to the masses and second as a mode of mass communication which can be used for instilling and propagating good values among the people. The vision of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru held ground for quite some time and during those early days the purpose of cinema was not entertainment but education and value building. Nitin Bose, an Indian film director, cinematographer and screenwriter active during the years from 1930's - 1960's in an interview in Cinema Vision India, Volume 1, Number 2, April 1980 Says

"When we directed films, we tried to make pictures with messages that would wake people up, rouse them. They could see themselves in our pictures. Just entertainment had no value, in fact, the word 'Entertainment' was not used. Debaki Bose,

Charu Roy, Prafulla Roy, P.C. Barua, lat Bimal Roy, Hem Chander… all of us felt this way."

This outlook is strikingly different from the modern times where in the mantra of success for a film was accurately summed up by Vidya Balan in her 2011 Blockbuster, 'The Dirty Picture', where in she comments—A film becomes a hit only because of three reasons – "Entertainment, entertainment and entertainment". This change in the way movies were being watched and perceived was not effected in a single day but gradually began from the 1990's.

The 21st Century Bollywood Audience

The audience of the contemporary period has become more mature and adventurous, it is no longer satisfied with one story being presented in novel ways, and the need for different issues, angles and narratives has grown. The audience now looks for a combination of genres in a film, movies with a good script and an entertainment value is appreciated, for instance the best example can be '3 Idiots' (2009) which was a blockbuster. The movie had everything be it comedy, friendship, romance or a social message all of which were blended in a way to create the perfect mix of a Hindi Blockbuster.

The Audience profile has also diversified in the contemporary period, with a growing middle class population and an increase in the young populace, these people have become the main targets of the filmmakers; apart from them Western audiences, film research scholars and film critics also have started to take a keen interest in Bollywood. After the year 2001 when Bollywood was accorded the legal status of an industry under the Industries Disputes Act of 1947 in India, things changed further. This meant that the film industry which was earlier privately funded could now be funded by national banks. Not only had this been beneficial to Bollywood in terms of fund raising but had also increased its stature Manifold. Films and movies are unarguably one of the most powerful medium to put an idea across.

With the growing viewership this medium has become all the more potent. According to one global consulting firm, by 2025 the middle class in India will comprise more than 40 per cent of the population and it is this middle class which are the target audience for most of the filmmakers. The contemporary Hindi cinema has become a reflection of the desires and aspirations of the growing middle class. This class is spending and is willing to spend more and more on entertainment and leisure.

As per the International Goldman Sachs report of October 2003, which states that over the next 50 years, four countries – Brazil, Russia, India and China (the BRIC economies) - will become key players in the world marketplace? India could emerge as the World's third largest economy and of these four countries; it has the potential to show the fastest growth over the next 30 to 50 years, the report states. Rising incomes may also see these economies move through the sweet spot of growth for different kinds of products, as local spending patterns change. It goes on to predict that the Indian entertainment industry would significantly benefit from the fast economic growth as this cyclically sensitive industry grows

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faster when the economy is expanding. Since the opening up of the economy in the early 1990's, the boundaries of Bollywood cinema are getting blurred. Never before has there been such a worldwide awakening towards Bollywood cinema and cross fertilization of film ideas and talent from the subcontinent. In effect, mainstream Hindi filmmakers are beginning to realize that it is possible to intelligently design films which can prove profitable both for the Domestic and the overseas market.

Thus, Hindi Cinema has become a global entertainment power with lots of help from the extensive media coverage and the thriving online celebrity culture. The only blot in the current progressing scenario is the piracy and counterfeiting of films. With the growing access to internet and ever expanding reach of technology, it is very convenient to find duplicate and pirated copies of the films which can affect the movie industry. But as one writer puts it, —the coming of Camera pictures are no threat for the Paintings, similarly the film culture is so engrained in India that it is unlikely to affect the audiences from reaching the theatres to watch a film, but can slower down the progress.

Conclusion

The overall conclusion is derived not as whole, but as parts subsiding to the negative and positive aspects of films and their relationship with the general audience. The major conclusive derivation of the study indicated that though audience have a huge role in affecting the film scenarios, the vice-versa holds more power in the consumption age, where entertainment consumption is greater than ever before.

Hence, conclusions are formulated as parts subsiding to the negative and positive aspects of films, as an integral part of society both in present and future; also underlying the audience's expectation with the entertainment they consume which paves the way for things to not be changed in their entirety.

The Positives
Entertainment

Movies are a major source of entertainment. From the moment we indulge in watching a movie we enter into a new world, forgetting all our worries and also our mind is at ease. Rich, poor, literate, illiterate, young or old all need something for relaxation. Recreation is an important part of each one's life, thus watching a movie provides this avenue.

The audience significantly affects the entertainment value of films today, there's a growth in the population and it subsequently leads to drastic changes in the variety of films which are made, comparing it to the by gone eras of Bollywood, the industry produces the most diverse films today than ever before.

Movies Inspires the Society

Movies inspire us more than we think it can. Inspirational movies help us to become brave, clever, loyal, determined etc. which helps us to become positive – minded people. Movies like 'Bhaag Milkha Bhaag', 'Mary Kom' etc. are true examples of arousing a feeling for good among the audience.

An increasing number of biopics, such as on the lives of athletes, social workers, and on real life events (terrorist attacks, riots, discoveries…) etc., is influenced by the audience preferences to pursue films as a source of infotainment.

Comedy

Films along with plays and dramas including the T.V. shows have served a lot in making its audience laugh. The genre of comedy movies is liked by almost all the age groups and can be enjoyed with the family. Some of the golden movies in Comedy are 'Hera Pheri', 'Phir Hera Pheri', 'Golmal series' etc. These Bollywood Blockbusters have always put a smile on everyone's face. These are the movies that help people to revive from their day to day depressing lives. Laughter as being said the best medicine is distributed among the audience by Bollywood at a regular basis.

The Negatives
Movies Proclaim Violence

We cannot deny the fact that movies today are way more violent than before. The film makers choose these themes which surprisingly increases their fan following by audience. Movies like these show new ways of physical abuse and torture which encourages young minds to indulge into these acts. The general audience prefers action movies, it has always been a 'Hit' genre, people prefer to witness violence (in forms of guns, battles, combat scenes…) as it gives them a sense of thrill and adventure. Evidently, such preferences more often than not have a negative impact on the society as the whole.

Conflicting Personality

If the actors are unideal heroes then they also have unideal personalities. How the actors portray themselves on the screen is not actually what they are off screen. We as human beings are quite judgmental; we create an opinion about others whom we don't know quite fast. As superstars are taken as most of ours role-models so in return they have a responsibility towards the society. We as fans think that our role models do not indulge in any of the evil acts but on the other side we get to hear about them as some of them are chain smokers, some are drug addicts etc. Basically they portray themselves the opposite of what they are on screen.

Adultery and Sex Vulgarity

Over time movie makers have turned the way of showing romance in movies. We see today that nudity has become a usual practice in most of the movies or is seen as a way to attract audience and make movie a huge commercial success. Most of the scenes depicted directly affect the young as they being immature do not get the essence of scenes and try implementing in real life leading to miserable life problems. These are leading to a mentally and physically disturbed society.

Some Provide Wrong Messages

Many a times some scenes in movies depict something that is far from reality. In some, Sikhs are joked upon because of their turbans or blacks are depicted as gangsters which is not the case always. Women are also sometimes shown as lower than men and are usually treated brutally. There are sometimes

superheroes performing few stunts which seem to be unrealistic.

I will end up saying that movies if on one side are beneficial then, on the other it may be fatal as well. Movies affect us a lot in our daily life. A person should decide what to watch and go for decent films, because the film makers have only one primary objective, i.e. to sell tickets and earn money. Watching every movie that is not meant for that age group is merely a waste of time. Today, if we look towards the vulgarity including violence related movies then they are running at the box office because there is a demand, as soon as the demand goes off, supply will cease. More importantly, censor board should look into the matter and avoid the disturbing scenes that put harm to the society. In the end, movies are meant to be enjoyed and it depends on the individual that which movie to go for and get his/her life affected.

We can logically deduce that humans create films to express feelings they have, feelings we all have. But have we gone too far? We have to make a clear distinction to what is fake and what is real, and to what is tolerable or bearable and what is simply going over the limit.

By typing Violence in Films in Google you will get 224,000,000 results. It is obviously a matter of great concern for the public.So how exactly do violence, rape, murder, sex, and verbal offence contribute to violence and indecent acts in our society? We can clearly see it has an effect on our lives. What intrigues me the most is why can't we, as rational human beings, make a distinction between what clearly is supposed to be an art form, and reality. Why do we let a motion picture inflict damage on the progress of our own lives?

"Because ours is a puritanically-based society and we have problems with depictions of sex, we tend to eroticize violence. For many people this creates an unfortunate, often even unconscious, link between sex and violence." – From "Sex Research, Censorship, and the Law". Think of this as true up to the extent that all our actions are based on what we learn and what we know, and we as human beings learn by seeing and imitating. Following this trend of thought we can infer that as we see from movies, we tend to act accordingly, by the means of learning and practicing.

Therefore, the conclusion, we as a society, are not ready to create our own art forms, and expression, and really understand and act independently to so. In painting, we often let our minds wander off based on the expression, colours and objects depicted in the artist's creation. May people have committed murder based on this? Indeed

it is possible, just as it was also possible to commit murder after reading "The Catcher in the Rye", so why not?

We, as a society, must first learn to control our bodies, our minds, and our actions before putting ourselves to the test and searching for a medium for expression, and searching for alternate art forms. After all, there is a lot to be learned about murder. Watching crime films, and different genres of films gives a lot of insight as to how the world works, what we are made of, why we do the things we do. Nonetheless, we must learn to control ourselves before being exposed to such material, as the untrained mind will not only obtain knowledge from the good parts of movies, but also will learn from the bad parts, the immoral parts, the violent parts, etc.

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