

THE CHANGING NARRATIVES OF CINEMA THROUGH TIMES

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses how the narrative in Indian cinema has changed with times. One finds a persistent change in the depiction of female characters.

There is an ever-widening gap in the representation of the female point of view. The female voice is also fading into oblivion from the music scene. One has tried to compare old and new movies with respect to human emotions and conflicts. These conflicts though timeless; are shown in different lights and changing stances as the time moves on through the dear medium that is Indian cinema.

The changing Narratives of cinema through times

Narrative is a word used throughout the ages to describe the evolution of thought and the flow of ideas. These ideas and thoughts change according to the times and it is through the narrative again that we record this change.

This change is as natural as passing of time itself; but it is through the reading of these changing narratives that we can analyze the change in society and cultures across the dimensions. How is this different from anthropology you ask? Well, where anthropology wants to focus on the evolution part of culture in a positive

manner, a study of narrative focuses on the narratives that humanity picks up during this evolution; a sort of a critique of humanity if you may call it that.

Time, as we humans see it, is much more and vast than our comprehension. It is so vast a void that I personally believe it is an overstatement to call ourselves even bubbles in its grand comparison, so let's not talk of millennia. Let's submit to a more 70 or 60 year analysis of narratives.

Movies are the most elementary Narratives, the most easily accessible and the most reflective of our times . In India movies are the most commonly welcomed Narratives after let's say; Tulsidas's

Ramayana. You want to know how a courtesan lived in the 1800s; watch *Umrao Jaan*(1981). If you want to feel the dilemmas a Muslim head of family felt after the partition of India ;watch *Garam Hawa*(1974). If it's the magnificence of the Mogul court you want to see, watch *Mughal e Azam*(1960). These movies have now turned into picture postcards of the times they record .

It is through these movies that we are also transported into these worlds and get to live other lives and experience other worlds.

But lately one feels a movement (not that of the tectonic plates) a movement of a different kind .It seems the narratives are moving away from thinking and analyzing towards simplicity. Towards catered thoughts and pre-decided conclusions. There is an absolute lack of evaluation .Modern movies like *Kashmir files*(2022) or *Darlings*(2022) or even *Pushpa*(2021) simply tell us -this is what is right and there is no scope for debate.

You might say movies have been made like this always well yes; but there are movies like *Amar*(1954) or *Pavithra Paapi*(1970) or even some as recent and iconic as *Dewaar*(1975) which have

narratives that are open to interpretation. This analysis or debate is found intertwined in the narrative itself in the form of a conflict in the mind of the protagonist in *Amar* (1954) or a cathartic justice towards the end of the movie as in *Dewaar*(1975). Sometimes a brilliant scriptwriter comes up with a character like a Kunj Bihari uncle in *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985) who asks all the disruptive questions bang in the middle of the Narrative.

When we compare these movies to the stories of today like *Pushpa*(2021) or *Bahubali*(2015) et cetera . As a viewer one wants to question the moralities of let's say Mahindra Baahubali killing Bhallaldev in the end of the Movie or why Pushpa is entitled to kill just because he has had a tough childhood. Nowhere in these Narratives is there a scope for a debate and it is the absence of this space for analysis that sperates the modern narrative from earlier ones.

Surprisingly we seem to be regressing where narratives are concerned. In an effort to oversimplify the script, the writers are reverting to caricatures. Yes there is a place for Queer characters but they are just limited to the funny gay friend of the heroine or just a lesbian girl who appears

manly for no apparent reason. Yes there are characters from all religions but a Sikh will always be shown for *balley balley* purpose and a Muslim friend is always there with red teeth from paan. One finds it disturbing that whenever a character is introduced in a storyline what comes along is either an ethnicity or a background which puts the character in a mould.

Unbelievable is the place of women in these stories. There simply aren't strong mothers like Nirupa Roy as in *Deewar(1975)* who have a back stories or a mother like Waheeda Rehman in *Thrishul(1978)* who has a solid contribution in the progression of the story or even a small but significant part of the hero's mother in the movie *Gambler(1971)*. The mothers or sisters in the stories of today are typical flat characters where the only task assigned to them is the exposition of a crucial detail that they have to expose as a catalyst in the plot. The female presence in the narrative is unfortunately reduced to an insignificant background character in the male universe where she just appears briefly to show his romantic side or to bring about a song or two from his side. The female is a passive presence, a background entity thanks to movies like *Animal (2023)*, *Arjun Reddy*

(2017) and even new narratives like *Kantara(2022)*. Writers and directors like Sandeep Reddy Vanga, Anurag Kashyap and Rishabh Shetty show the female as a passive presence a typical flat background character who doesn't have a voice, doesn't evolve and doesn't make a difference. On the contrary if we go back just a few years movies like *Pyasa(1957)*, *Haste Zakhm(1973)*, *Chetna(1970)*, *blackmail(1973)*, *Sharmili(1971)*, *Aradhana(1969)*, *Silsila(1981)*, *Chandni(1989)*, *Lamhe(1991)*, *Mother India(1957)*, had women playing not just lead roles but actually were a part of the narratives itself. Sensitive topics like state of prostitutes were brought to the forefront in movies like *Chetna(1970)* or *Pyasa(1957)*. These narratives were written by writers who, in spite of being men could feel the pain of a woman, who saw the woman as a part of the story and could contribute to the stories through active participation not only as a background presence. Today in pictures like *War (2019)* *Bang Bang(2014)*, *Kabir Singh(2019)*, *Kantara(2022)*, *Baahubali(2016)*, *Gangs of Wasseypur(2012)*, *Main hoon Na(2004)*, women are just supporting characters. Only singing, dancing, faceless entities with no background stories.

Yes films like *Padmavat*(2018), *Gangubai Kathiyawadi* (2022) or *The Dirty Picture*(2011) do come up once in a while but these are written specifically for the purpose of a female centric narrative and are made only to showcase the talent of an established big time heroine . Unfortunately in a typical mainstream movie the female presence is mundane, monotonous and very fast,” forwardable”.

An eye opening proof of this is the absence of the female voice in songs. It's as if nobody wants to listen to what a woman has to say. 75% of all the songs in movies today are sung by male characters as *Badla* songs or love songs or aggressive songs. Where is the female expression. If we remove the so-called item numbers in movies of today; there are hardly any songs sung by female characters. Songs like *Asha main Asha* from *Blackmail* (1973) or *Kya janun piya* from *Baharon ke Sapne* (1967).

So what's to be done? Well hope shines through in the form of OTT platforms

coming up with soft and female centric narrative like *Masaba Masaba*(2020) ,*four more shots*,(2019-22) *Delhi Crime*(2019) . But even these are few and far between. Power to female directors like Meghna Gulzar for *Raazi*(2018),*Zoya Akhtar* for *Dil Dhrakne Do*(2015). Let's have more *Barbies* is what I say.

The people sights and sounds represented in cinema are the picture postcards of the times they were made in. The coming generations will judge us according to the pictures we projected on that cinema screen. How are generation handles questions related to moralities and how we portrayed people who thought differently. After all it is these movies like *mother India* (1957), *Pakiza* (1972), *Mugl e azam* (1960), *Trishu l*(1978) *Amar* (1954)and even *Pyaasa* (1957) that show us the visions of revolutionaries like Vijay Anand and Sahir Ludhiyanavi and Guru Dutt who had the sensitivities to show human emotion in all its beauty and vulnerability.