Films as medium of Media Information Literacy

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Films have been an amazing source of entertainment all over the world. It has unprecedented ability to captivate the audience. Films can impress upon highly impressionable audience. Films not only entertain cine goers but good films also spread education about a variety of issues. While commercial cinema keeps business interests at the forefront and the films of commercial category possess all the ingredients which make the people come and watch movies in cinema halls. There is dance, drama, music, emotions, action, stunts, comedy and luxurious sets along with attire. The parallel cinema aims at making meaningful films with little business interests. Such films portray realistic society. There are no luxurious sets, costly costumes or false display of emotions. The plot of these films is rather strong and never loses sight of the story. There is realistic depiction. The characters act as if they are living such life in the film. That is where real acting skills are put to acid test. Most of the actors and film makers of Parallel cinema come from National School of Drama and, Television and Film institute of India. They are well trained in their respective fields. One will never find chocolate heroes and dazzling heroines as such films. These films portray life as it is. That’s why actors have to understand their roles very minutely because the director wants them to portray the society in its real sense on celluloid tape. There are no item songs. The songs in these films are always situational songs which serve as a link among different parts of the plot. These are all meaningful songs. These films of Parallel cinema always have some message to convey. They portray the real life on reel. As these films don’t possess ingredients of typical Bollywood Masala Films so they rarely get box office hits. They are made for real cine lovers who understand this wonderful medium and who comprehend and appreciate the minutest details of the film. Such films often get nominated for National awards and International Film Festivals. The production cost of such films is not much as there are no superstars of commercial cinema in such films. Commercial cinema earns millions of Rupees just riding at the back of Masala Films. These days there is great thrust on animated films and fight oriented films. The production of meaningful films in commercial Cinema is very few and far between. But every now and then there are some meaningful films. Film makers like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, Mani Ratnam, Govind Nehlani, Anurag Kashyap, Sanjay leela Bhansali, farhan Akhtar, raj Kumar Hirani, Bimal Roy, rakesh roshan, Guru Dutt, Nandita Dass, Mira Nair, R. Balki and Vishal Bharadwaj may be counted among top film directors who have contributed and have been contributing immensely in the production of meaningful films.

The US film industry is the most earning film making industry in the world which is technically way ahead of other cinemas in the World. Los Angeles based American film industry is popularly known as Hollywood. ‘Bollywood’ the Bombay based Hindi film industry has also borrowed its name from Hollywood. The film industry comprises technical and commercial ingredients of film making. As per available data, the gross box office was worth $ 42.2 billion in 2019. In 2018 the global film industry was worth 136 billion. India has been producing the most films in the world annually since 1991. In 2019 India produced as many as 2446 feature films. Apart from Hollywood and Bollywood, film industry of China, Japan, South Korea, France, Germany, Spain and United Kingdom also produced commercially hit as well as meaningful films. In India Pune, Mumbai, Kolkata, kochi, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Bhubaneswar, Cuttack and Guwahati are major film cities. In 2019 the total box office collection of Indian films was US $ 27 billion. Apart from Indian films there are cinemas of India which produce films in regional languages of India. Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi, Gujrati, Telgu, Bhojpuri and Malyalam films have been performing well for last more than 20 years. It must be admitted that despite great technological and digital innovations in Indian films, they are still way behind to match the US and European films.

The saga of films started in Calcutta’s Star Theatre in 1897 when Stevenson organized a stage show. It encouraged Hiralal Sen to take to films and produced his first short film ‘The Flower of Persia’ in 1898. Then H.S. Bhatavdekar came up with his ‘The wrestlers’. The first full length Indian films were ‘Shree Pundalik’ made by Dadasaheb Torne and raja Harishchandra by Dada sahib Phalke in 1913.But ‘Shree Pundalik’ was mere recording of a stage play hence, the credit of being the first Indian film goes to dada Saheb Phalke’s ‘Raja Harishchandra’. This was the era of silent films which saw the production of more than several hundred films in Bombay, Calcutta and Madras. ‘Aalam Ar’ was the first Indian talkie made by Ardeshir Irani in 1931.

First Tamil-Telugu talkie ‘Kalidas’ was also produced in the same year by H.M. Reddy. ‘Savitri’, the first pure Telgu film produced by east India Film Company was a big success and won a diploma in 2nd Venice International Film Festival. Joyatia Prasad Agarwala made first Assamese film ‘Joymoti’ in 1935. Devdas in 1935 was a grand success. The credit of being the first Color film of India goes to ‘Kisan Kanya’(1937). ‘Sant Tuka ram’, was another hit film of this era. The formation of Indian People’s Theatre association started movement for making art films. Khwaja ahmad Abbas’s ‘Dharti Ke Lal’, ‘Mother India ‘ and ‘Pyasa’ are counted some of the most wonderful cinematic productions. Film Division was established in 1948 for giving rise to Documentary production. The period between 1940-1960 is regarded as ‘The Golden age of Indian Cinema’ during which social realistic films were produced. Films like already mentioned ‘Dharti Ke Lal’, Neecha Nagar’, ‘Nagrik’ and ‘Do Bigha zamin’ laid the foundation of Indian neorealism. Then came the era that was greatly dominated by the meaningful films of Satyajit Ray.

He started with ‘Pather Panchali’ and went on to make films like ‘Jalsaghar’, ‘Charulata, Aparajito’, ‘Sonar Kella’, Gopy Gayanbaga bayan’ and Apu Triology. His Apu Triology won him prizes at several prestigious International Film Festivals. It was Ray who laid a very strong foundation of Parallel Cinema in India. The popularity of Parallel Cinema was at its peak in the 70s. films like Kati Patang, Amar Prem, Daag,Sacha Jhutha, aaradhna, Anand, Haathi Mere Sathi, Ardh Satya, Aarkosh etc. made their...
mark on the realistic films stage of the world. The screenplay duo of Salim-Javed contributed heavily in revitalizing Indian Hindi Films.


Vishal Bharadwaj brought the works of Shakespeare in Indian Hindi Cinema with his films like Omkara, Maqbool and Haider. Munna Bhai MBBS was a trend setter in early days of 21st century. Gadar : Ek Prem Katha also needs to be mentioned as a super hit film. With the turn of century, the era of films celebrating Silver, Gold, Platinum and Diamond Jubilee ended as the parameters of success changed. This century has a number of successful stars and actresses who have become heart throbes of cine lover in last two decades. They include Arjun Kapoor, Ranbir Singh, Ranvir Kapoor, Shahid Kappr, Varun Dhawan, Sushant Singh Rajput, Tiger Shroff, Vidya Balan, Priyanka Chopra, Kaitrina Kaif, Alia Bhatt, Deepika Padukone, Anushka Sharma, Kangana Ranaut and Sonakshi Sinha.

According to Forbes, Shah Rukh Khan is arguably 'the World’s Biggest Movie Star' as of 2017 as he is immensely popular in India, Pakistan, China and the West. In 2001 Hindi Cinema sold 3.6 billion tickets as compared to the sale of 2.6 billion tickets of Hollywood.

With the era of Digitalization and computerization the film making techniques witnessed unprecedented changes. The Digital Cameras took the place of Celluloid tape loaded cameras. Video and audio film editing saw revolutionary changes. Cinema theaters gave way to more comfortable and digitalized Audis. Film making and film watching has undergone sea changes. Prasads IMAX Theatre in Huderaabad had the distinction of World’s most attended screen. There were times when only Mumbai used to have a Film City. Now we have Ramoji Film City in Hyderabad, Noida Film City, NOIDA, Innovative Film City in Bengaluru and MGR Film City in Chennai. Following is a view of the façade of Ramoji Film City, Hyderabad which is rated as the best film city in the country. It has the distinction of being World’s largest Film Studio. Indian cinema has a number of genres and films are produced in a number of regional languages of India. Indian cinema has been influence by Hollywood, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Irani and Turkish cinema.

Pan-Indi films differ from regional Indian films. It refers to a film movement that has its roots in South India. Baahubali was the beginning of Pan-Indian films. The term Pan-Indian films are used when a film is simultaneously releases in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada and Hindi. It helps in maximizing the audience base and make significant increase in revenue generation. Music has been and it still is an integral part of Indian Films. ‘Inder Sabha’ a film made in 1932 had as many as 72 songs. Many films have got unprecedented success flying on the wings of fantastic lyrics, melodious singing and soothing music. As per a report music contributes as much as 48% of net sales of a film. Every Indian film usually has 5-6 songs. Mohammad Rafi, Kishore Kumar, Mukesh, Yeshudas, Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhonsle, Udit Narayan, S. Balasubramanyam, Mohinder Kapoor and Shamshad Begham have been the legendary singers of Indian Film Industry. They brought the audience to cinema halls virtually on their own in the 60s,70s, 80s and 90s. Now-a-days music lovers feel the lack of melody in film and non-film songs. Lyricists like Anand Bakshi, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Hasrat Jaipuri, Sahir Ludhianvi etc are no more to be found in Indian, particularly Hindi, films. Photography, Cinematography, locale, make up and music along with choreography play a big role in attracting the audience to cinema halls. Good and long lasting songs are nowhere to be found. But it is true that the number of films produced in India has increased a lot but its audience has been decreasing. It may well be because of the arrival of OTT platforms whose web series episodes and uncensored content has become enormously popular among the audience. But one has to admit that the content in films has taken a nose dive. That’s why films don’t run for more than a month in cinema halls. Increased quantity has greatly affected the quality of films.

Now the emphasis is on fighting, stunts, cinematography and choreography. The story, plots, acting and messages are rather rare in Hindi films. Films are a wonderful medium to convincingly impress upon the audience. Let’s take the example of

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Padman and Toilet: Ek Prem Katha. Both had very simple story. There were no luxurious sets. No costly costumes. No splendid Cinematography. No choreography at all. No suspense. No stunts. No fighting. No foreign locations. No big budget. But still they were box office hits. Just because they had a message to convey, people came out in great numbers to watch these movies. These films have cemented their place among all time super hit films. The same may be true about 3 Idiots and Lagaan.

People still aspire for movies with good content and some message. Telgu and Hindi versions of “Pushpa” have got resounding success. This happened when critics started saying that the arrival of OTT platforms have given films a telling blow. One must remember that a good film with strong story line, compact plot, meaningful lyrics and a strong message still has the capacity to captivate the audience. The same is true about a Haryanvi Film by Yash Sharma “Dada Lakhmi”. The storyline, plot, acting and situational songs has made it the best Haryanvi film so far. Same was the case with Punjabi film “Ardhaas” that made the people watch it manytimes in cinema halls. Bahubali was a great success and it was able to bring the audience back to cinema halls.

Though the trend of watching a film, web series and TV serials on Laptop or Smart Phones is fast becoming popular with young generation but one must admit that one may only watch minute details of a film in cinema halls only. Film is a big screen medium which can never be appreciated while watching it on Smart phones. That may be because a vast majority of Indian youth possesses Smart Phone these days.

We have noted in the above discussion that Smart Phones have taken over other gadgets so far as young and 30-45 age groups is concerned. These people depend heavily on Smart Phones for informational, educational and entertainment needs. But there is no denying the fact that films have been and they still are the most impressive means of mass communication. It may be somewhat costly medium but it is the medium that brings home the message in significantly astonishingly manner. The success of Indian Parallel Cinema, French New Wave Cinema and Russian Realistic Cinema stands as witness that meaningful films don’t ever go unnoticed. People do watch, appreciate and love such films. Who can forget “Do Bigha Zameen”, “Garm Hawa”, “Ankur”, “Aaraksh”, “Earth”, “Ardh Satya”, “Aaraksh”, “masoom”, Ek Ruka Hua faisla”, “Salaam Bombay”, Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro”, “Ek Doctor Ki Maut”, “Rui Ka Bojh” and ‘Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro”. These have been the milestone of Indian Cinema. All these films are still remembered because they had some message to convey. They have impeccable story line and fantastic plot glued with exemplary acting.

It is here that the film as a medium occupies great place in this era of Digital Media. Films have long gone digital. There are digital cameras, digital sound recording, digital music, digital audio-visual effects, digital special effects, digital graphics and above all digital editing. The film screens in cinema halls have also become digital. This digitalization has revolutionized film viewing experience. As we know India is the biggest film producing country in the World. India does not produce films in Hindi language only. There are regional films which rub shoulders with the best of Hindi films. Sometime critics even rate Telgu, Tamil and Kannada films much better than Hindi cinema in subject matter, acting, fighting and stunts. Of late, even Punjabi, Bhojpuri, Malayalam and Marathi films have also made a niche for themselves. It means the scope of spreading information and education through films is better than any other country in India. Films can contribute a lot in spreading Digital Media Literacy. If films like Padman and Toilet: Ek Prem Katha can succeed in recent past, there should be no doubt about the role of films in successfully spreading Media Information Literacy (MIL). This MIL has attained great importance today with the advent of Internet and Internet based Digital Media. Digital Media has fast usurped the audience of other media of Mass Communication.

Digital media is available on computer and any computerized gadget. These gadgets include Laptops, Palmtops, Tablet and Smart Phones. Markets, all over the World, have been flooded with a huge variety and range of Smart Phones. One can have a Smart phone in about 6000/- rupees. Nay, even less than that. It is not necessary that people must possess very costly Apple iPhone. Companies like Samsung, Vivo, OPPO, Xiaomi, Realme, Sony, Panasonic, Nokia, Lava, Honor, Apple, Micromax, Motorola, HTC, OnePlus and Huawei. All these companies make Smart phones for every income group. One may buy a Smar Phone as per the capacity of his pocket. Yes, the features and memory of these phones go on enhancing with the highest version. The features of Vivo, Samsung and Apple iPhone are regarded as the best than others. But the admirers and users of other companies are also in millions. It is an enigma that people possess smart phones but they lack the literacy how to use them for their own and social development. This might be because the ICT-revolution caught the Indians unawares. The traditional Indian people were not ready when Satellite TV Channels caught them unawares. They still don’t know what to watch and what not on TV. They still consider TV serials as real life stories. These confused minds got enormously more confused with the arrival of Smart Phones in the market. They still don’t know how to make the most of immense information available on Digital Media. Yes, Social Media is very popular among people of all age groups. But its popularity among young generation is matchless.

People use social media without even knowing the basics and purpose of Social Media. There are a number of Social Media sites. People have multiple accounts on Social Media Sites. Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Twitter, Sharechat and above all YouTube are very popular Social Media sites with millions of active users in India. Studies have revealed that the youth spends 5-6 hours every day on Social Media only which is alarmingly high as compared to its consumption in other countries in the world. Social Media depends entirely on user generated content. The users not only generate content, they upload, share and download the content also. Here one must underline the fact that it is user generated content media. One may upload any number of photographs. The trend of clicking selfies and uploading them on Social Media and tagging friends with post is very common. Tagging enables the user uploaded post reach out to more people. There is a sort of competition to get more and more like to one’s post. The opposite of this leads to distress and sorrow which may take one to serious mental disorders, stress and depression. Making friend is very common on Facebook and Instagram. People keep high hopes from those people whom they have never met. When such friends stop responding to them it hurts them deep. Most of the information, pics, visual content and even audio visual content on Social Media is either fake or devoid of authenticity. There is misinformation and disinformation all around. It is very difficult even for the experts to find and distinguish between factual information and disinformation. Common people often take this disinformation as authentic information. They don’t have that all the information on Social Media has been generated and uploaded by people like them only. It is here that the real problem lies.
As of now, there are no rules and regulations governing Social Media anywhere in the World. India is no exception. There are no legislations. Users are at liberty to write and post anything they like on Social Media. Trusting in false information can prove to be very dangerous for communal harmony, fraternity and national integrity of this multi lingual and multi cultural country. People need to be literate as only literate people can distinguish between true information and disinformation. One post is enough to tarnish somebody’s image and character assignation.

Digital Media has given guns in the hands of novices. Possession of academic degrees does not make one literate it is the knowledge and usage of the technology that decides the level of literacy. This is what is meant by Media Literacy. Digital Media is replete with enormous amount of data and disinformation. Media Literacy is required to ensure intelligent and logical use of Digital Media.

Information Literacy is essential to distinguish between information, disinformation and misinformation. Sometime it seems that people have dived in deep waters of Digital Media without having the skills of diving or swimming. This is a very serious and worrisome scenario. It is not the case that Digital Media is like a hurricane that will diminish after making its presence felt. Digital Media has come with a bang and it is here to stay for a lot many years. Future belongs to Digital Media only. having media literacy is altogether different thing. That’s why Media and Information Literacy has great significance. Habitat of an urban are of a metropolitan does not license that the person is Media Literate. He may be intelligent, smart and clever but being media literate is an altogether different thing.

Films can be of immense help in order to make people MIL literate. This Media and Information Literacy can be depicted, conveyed and understood through films in much better way. If films can be made about toilets, they can also be made to spread awareness about Digital Media. People will understand the meaning of MIL more easily through films than any other medium. As seeing is believing so this audio visual medium has great potential in making the people Media Literate. Only a truly Media Literate person can save himself from cyber crime, cyber theft and distinguish between news and non-news. It has become imperative to enable oneself to save from becoming a victim of misleading disinformation and misinformation. Films can do that. Films can help make people Media and Information Literate. Films can make people aware about how to make the most of Digital Media. They can certainly be of great help to educate people to write, upload, send and share sensible and authentic messages. People must know about fact checking applications. They also must know how to check the authenticity of a textual message, a photograph, an audio clip and audio-visual message. This literacy is the most required in this era in India and around the world. Financial literacy can save people from losing their hard earned money. Hence, Digital Media Literacy must be acquired before it is too late. Films can play a decisive role in MIL. Hope film makers start making films on Media and Information Literacy for the sake of humanity. Experts look towards cinema with great hopes and one expects that this hope will succeed as there is no dearth of meaningful film makers.

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