Volume : 3 | Issue : 4 | April 2014 • ISSN No 2277 - 8160



Research Paper COMMUNICATION

Emergence of Cinema as a strong Tool of Social Change

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ABSTRACT

Gone are the days when the movies started with a dream woven by a teenage girl of a hero entering her life on a white horse fighting against all the so called " villains" and the film finally ending with a common note, "Happily ever after" . Today cinema focuses on realistic issues and matters rather than depicting impractical and unrealistic stories and it plays a major role in portraying certain fundamental social and political issues which not only entertains the masses but also educates them on these issues and helps them develop an opinion thus acting as a strong tool behind Socio- Political Transformation and Mass Enlightenment. Movies have drastically transformed not only in technical terms but also in terms of story lines, nature of portrayal of characters, genders and issues.

The paper tries to deal with the fact as to how Indian Cinema has changed in terms of its stories and issues and it makes a deeper analytical study to find out the opinion of the masses at large as to what is their opinion about Present Cinema and its impact on Society in the direction of acting as a strong tool of Social Awareness and Social Change.

KEYWORDS: Social Issues, Contemporary cinema, Social change, Indian politics, Social taboos, Social Awareness

Introduction

Change is the thumb rule of life and so have been Indian cinema. As society has evolved from time to time so has the stories of Indian Cinema and its characters. If one compares the mainstream cinema of yesteryears and the present contemporary cinema, one would notice remarkable differences between the two.. Modern Indian cinema have drastically transformed not just in technical terms but a major amount of difference can also be noticed in their themes, issues as well as storylines too. Its true that certain film makers did make realistic films in the 60s and 70s , but they were all given the name of Art Cinema or Parallel Cinema . But if one focuses on the normal mainstream cinema one could find the stories to be very simple, predictable, quite unrealistic, somewhat like fairy tales which had no relation with reality and as a result the movies used to be fully laden with just endless number of melodious songs with wonderful lyrics and composition which was highly appreciated by the audiences and were very popular amongst them.

Even if we see the later half of 80s and the initial years of 90s, we find that movies like Ashique, Hum Apke Hai Kaun, Maine Pyaar Kiya which had become household names and created record in the history of box office success story, were actually family dramas based on simple, emotional stories which could be watched by a person with his entire family and were a total three hour entertainment, but if one tries to relate them with the realities of life, then they were highly disappointing

The movies of those times mainly tried to captivate the attention of the audiences basically with their very popular songs or because of the star cast or the dialogues. Most of the movies had no major issues or strong message to give to the audiences , thus having no role in educating the masses by making them aware of social issues and problems.

Of course society has changed and so have the movies and their stories. Issues like corruption in government circles, specially police department, sexual abuse, gender bias, dirty politics, gang war and many such issues have become a part of today's society, so how can the movies stay aloof or indifferent to it. Movies have to become mirrors of society and to a certain extent we find today's film makers ready to make movies on various burning issues, thus ready to experiment on new concepts and themes.

Review of certain Contemporary Movies and Literature Review

Lets start from the issue of portrayal of women character in today's cinema. Of course no one can deny the fact that movies after all is a piece of art and above all a source of entertainment, so no matter whatever theme or issue the movie might be based on , still there is a certain element of drama and fantasy in cinema but even in spite of these there are many movies which are being made by the film makers which have highlighted certain major issues being confronted by women in their everyday life or there are certain movies which are women centric and which have highlighted today's women as no longer just mere victims of suppression and exploitation but as strong human beings who have learned to fight against all injustices inflicted on them. Such movies have been instrumental in changing the image of women in society.

Not only in terms of Women Empowerment related issues or stories, but movies are also nowadays based on certain issues which greatly revolve around problems which are faced by women in their everyday lives. "No One Killed Jessica" was a movie which was based on the real life story of Jessica Lal who was a barmaid in an uptown eatery in Delhi. The movie was an excellent piece of work displaying all the lacunas existing in the policing system and the corruption existing at the government circles.

A very important study in the direction of how female characters are portrayed in the present Indian cinema has been done by Nidhi Shendurnikar Tere in her Research Paper titled, " GENDER REFLECTIONS IN MAINSTREAM HINDI CINEMA". The paper describes both the positive as well as the negative portrayal of feminism in Indian Cinema. The paper describes about certain movies which have portrayed women as strong and confident characters acting as great agents in the direction of changing the mindset of women who have always considered themselves as weaker sections of the society in comparison to men. The paper explains that, " On the positive side, there are a chunk of film-makers who have reacted against the stereotypes set by mainstream cinema and have dared to explore subjects from the women" s perspective. Contemporary films like *No One Killed Jessica (2011), Cheeni Kum (2007), Chameli (2003), Ishqiya (2010), Paa (2009) and Dirty Picture (2011)* have pictured extraordinary themes and portrayed women as central to the story line. These films have forced creators to take a fresh look at the different roles played by women and introspect into the kind of typecast that was being perpetuated earlier. It is also to the credit of the current crop of actresses who have not been hesitant to accept bold roles. Actresses like *Vidya Balan* (Paa, Dirty Picture, Kahani, Ishqiya) and *Konkona Sen Sharma* (Page 3, Wake Up Sid, Life in a Metro, Mr. and Mrs. Iyer) have led this change of direction. Other actresses like *Jaya Bachchan, Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das* have also appeared in strong and independent roles which for the time being shifted the camera" s focus from the women" s body to her identity as an individual. Such actresses have challenged the norm."

Today's film makers have also made films highlighting the life style of women belonging to a particular profession. Movies like Fashion and Heroine had strong female characters and they were highly successful in bringing before the facts of real life of a fashion model or an actress, popularly called as "heroine". The film "Fashion" had two leading female characters named Meghna played by Priyanka Chopra and Shonali played by Kangana Ranaut. The movie had

beautifully highlighted the hidden pain of a fashion model whose life might seem to look very glamorous and happening from outside but that's just one side of the story. The movie brought before the other side of the story which was more sad, nastier and more real. The film was somewhere successful in exposing the real story of fashion models where they have to fight every moment of their life to exist in the industry as number one , as the industry was shown to be a world full of pretentions, jealousy, diplomacy and extreme competition.

Movies have drastically transformed not only in technical terms but also in terms of story lines, nature of portrayal of characters and issues. Movies like Wednesday, Rang De Basanti, Page 3, Water, Rajniti, Gangajal, Chandni Bar, Chameli and many more cannot be so easily forgotten by the viewers because of the strong message they tried to give to the masses and somewhere they were successful in their attempt of not just making the viewers aware of certain issues which were prevalent in the society but at the same time being instrumental behind changing the perception of those who were either totally ignorant about them or were having incomplete knowledge about them .

Whether it's the movie Water which highlighted the sorrows of girls who became widows at a very young age and had to spent rest of their life in renunciation or Chameli or Talaash or Chandni Bar which had so beautifully brought before the lives of sex workers or bar dancers. "Chandni Bar" movie was very realistic as well as very touching to the hearts of millions as it revealed the style of living of bar dancers and how in spite of their willingness to lead a good life, circumstances force them to dwell in the world of immorality, depression, helplessness and poverty.

While discussing about contemporary cinema and how its concept and stories have changed from just being imaginative to real life stories, one cannot forget one of the outstanding films of 2012 named " Gangs of Wassepur" made by Anurag Kashyap. The film created a separate place for itself amongst the film critics as well as in the hearts of viewers by being called as one of the most realistic films ever made. The story of the movie which was chiefly based on coal mafia and their gang rivalry gave the film an original and a very deep rooted setting.

Contemporary Cinema besides highlighting the facts of society also deals with some of the major social issues which one can never neglect or deny. A major social issue based film which acted as a strong tool of mass enlightenment was the film, "Peepli Live". The film made the viewers realize that cinema is just not a means of entertainment but it can be one of the strongest tools of mass enlightenment if they are based on the actual stories of life. The movie was based on the story of farmer suicides in Maharashtra. The film directed by Anusha Rizvi was again a totally different one in the genre of Thematic Cinema or Issue based Cinema. The film created a mark for itself because of its original story and true depiction of a village life. The movie was a great satire on Indian Government . The movie made the viewers contemplate on a major fact that although we say India has developed a lot but the real development has yet to take place at the grassroot level of villages where still today the poor villagers have to struggle each day just to meet the basic needs of their life.

In order to study on the fact that present Indian Cinema deals with various Social Issues, an important Case Study Research has been done by Shashwat Bhushan Gupta and Suraksha Gupta in their Research Paper named, "Representation of social issues in cinema with specific reference to Indian cinema: case study of Slumdog Millionaire" in which they tried to reveal the various facts of Indian Society through a case study of a film. The analysis revealed that the film satisfied its target audience by reflecting the current Indian Society. . It has also very cleverly managed to play on the minds of the audience by creating awareness of social issues that otherwise they would not have known about. Issues, like living in a slum, which incorporates poverty, begging, etc., portrayed in the film have been woven very creatively into the storyline".

In regard to the Present Indian Cinema highlighting various themes, the issue of Terrorism cannot be neglected as it has also been covered by various movies showing the facts behind it and sometimes the nexus between the politicians and the anti-social elements of society. Ranjani Mazumdar has pointed out this fact in her paper titled, " **Terrorism, Conspiracy, and Surveillance in Bombay's Urban Cinema"** through an analysis of three films, namely, Anurag Kashyap's *Black Friday* (2005), Raj Kumar Gupta's *Aamir* (2008), and Neeraj Pandey's *A Wednesday* (2009). This essay looks at three films from the context of Bombay that take the issue of terrorism to mediate the landscape of violence, conspiracy, surveillance, and the city. Unlike popular melodramas, the films discussed here open out cataclysmic events through reenactments and precision-style unraveling".

A major study in this direction has also been done by C.S.H.N. Murthy and Reetamoni Das in their research paper titled, "Social Change through Diffusion of Innovation in Indian Popular Cinema: An Analytical Study of *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* and *Stalin*" The paper makes a comparative analysis between contemporary cinema and the cinema of earlier decades. The paper points out towards a major fact that earlier the movies basically focused on religious or folk or rural life and had a very simple and a predictable story, whereas the present cinema brings before diverse issues, concepts and problems of society. The paper makes an in depth study of two films which created waves in the box office namely Stalin and Lage Raho Munna Bhai because of their new concept and some new lesson to deliver to the masses.

The paper describes in its literature review that according to a site (http://www.freerange.com/whitepapers/internet_film.pdf) ,cinema has been a strong medium of social change. The site points out that, " In this process of bringing social change, film as a medium has a major role to play. Social change is not only about big revolutions, but also changes in the daily attitudes of the people. Films can be a powerful tool in long term social change if they are delivered in collaboration with on-the-ground groups that are already engaged in the issues relevant to the film." The paper explains that, Mathew (2010) said that cinema is an art a medium that has not only "experimented" and "developed" quickly, but also has emerged as an important point of reference (2010: 179).

According to the Newsblog's link," blogs.thenews.com.pk /blogs/2012 /03/ film-for-**change**/", "Cinema is an extraordinarily powerful medium, much more powerful than television and newspaper. Cinema has been used all over the world to engender positive social change. In our neighbouring India, the film industry has done an admirable job by promoting communal and ethnic harmony, highlighting the ways of corrupt politicians, and pointing out other social issues." The Newsblog discusses how Indian Cinema by being based on cross cultural issues has played a major role in bringing the nations together and contributing to communal harmony.

"Rang De Basanti" was also a movie which besides having the normal song and dance sequences and fun based scenes, was also based on a very serious issue affecting the Air Force pilots and their family members. The movie dealt with the issue of frequent cases of MIG Plane accidents and the Government's negligence in dealing with the issue promptly which ultimately forces the students to stage candle light marches and to protest against the Government's indifferent attitude towards a serious issue which was resulting in the death of many fighter pilots.

"Swades" was another movie which dealt with a major issue confronting India, the issue of "Brain Drain". The movie poses a significant question in front of the educated and highly qualified sections of the society who value money and their selfish interests more than their duty towards doing something good for their own motherland. The movie becomes an exposition on the immense need for the 'educated, modern and privileged' to do their bit for those still living in complete ignorance at the grassroot level in Indian villages.

"Taare Zameen Par" was yet another movie which had a very realistic yet very emotional issue. The film did a commendable job in being one of the movies which had beautifully depicted the problem which affects many children who suffer from some or the other deficiency. The problem or issue that their children today are too stressed with school and are over burdened with studies when they should be enjoying their lives more. The film definitely made the parents think about this question for a while after watching the movie. The character of Ishaan played by Darsheel Safari suffering from Dyslexia had a very strong message to give to the parents that every child is blessed with some or the other talent, the only thing which matters is how to handle them with care , affection and a little bit of understanding so that their hidden talents get a chance to grow instead of suppressing them

by their indifferent and harsh behavior. The various elements of the movie , whether its the strong message, or the wonderful script, or the excellent star cast of the film and their awesome performances, or it's the delicate and emotional scenes, all contribute to make the film a memorable one.

According to **creative.sulekha.com/taare-zameen-par**-bringing... bollywood_325796_**blog**

" Taare Zameen Par is not only a feel good movie about bringing out a child's special abilities, but gives very important social messages while entertaining audiences. Aamir Khan continue to act, direct, and produce movies that not only touch the hearts of audiences, but give social messages that possibly can bring about social change in India.

Al Jazeera's site named, www.aljazeera.com /indepth /features /2012/... /201261071439473921. htm describes that the growth of a new force is responsible behind the making of realistic cinema and they are the new, talented and innovative film makers ,who believe in making cinema a vehicle of Social Change by showcasing in it the various issues and problems of society. The site says that, "In the 21st century, Indian cinema is both revisiting and breaking new grounds. New Bollywood is now led by "outsiders". These are actors and filmmakers who do not belong to any film families or yesteryear studio honcho heirs, which are a very tight-knit lobby.

The list is endless but the basic fact remains that contemporary cinema has changed drastically and its just not the film making style or technique which has changed but rather its concept, storyline or the issues which the films nowadays deal with have also remarkably changed.

Objectives behind the study

1. To make a study about the journey of Indian Cinema regarding the slow yet powerful changes related to the various aspects of Film Making
2. To bring before a major fact as to how the present cinema is a blend of entertainment, education and creating awareness through dissemination of information.
3. To make a Primary Research based study on the fact whether Indian Cinema has greatly changed in terms of its Concept, Storyline and Issues and if yes, then, how it is affecting the mindset of millions of Viewers and contributing as a catalyst of Social Change

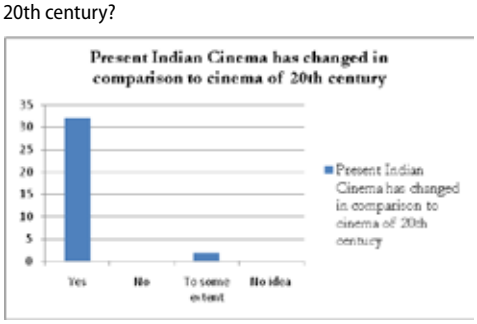
Methodology:

Keeping in mind the topic of the study it was decided to do a review of some of the outstanding movies of the present times, the key issues highlighted in the movies and how they have completely changed the total approach of Indian cinema in the 21st century. In order to further understand the fact that the present Indian Cinema has remarkably changed in all its various perspectives and to analyze how the issues depicted by it has created an impact on the cinema viewers, a primary research was done in the form of Survey on a sample population of 50 people, falling in the age group of 18- 35 years and who are great movie addicts.

Results:

1. Present Indian Cinema has changed in comparison to Cinema of 20th century

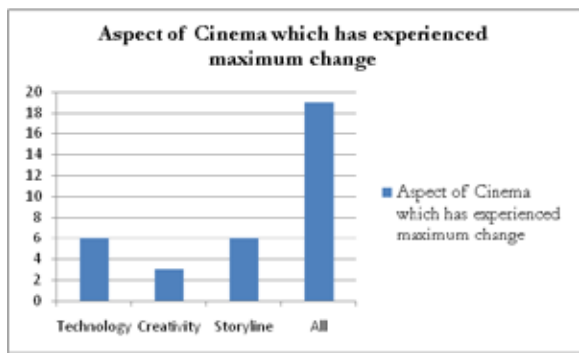
Response to the question, "Do you agree with the statement that the present Indian cinema has changed a lot in comparison to cinema of 20th century?



- 94.11% of the Cinema Viewer's were strongly of the opinion that the Present Indian Cinema has changed drastically in comparison to cinema of 20th century .
- 5.88 % of the viewers were of the opinion that present cinema to some extent has been successful in influencing the mindset of the masses and acting as agents of Social Change.
- A major result of the survey was that none of the sample population were of the opinion that present cinema has not changed in relation to cinema of yesteryears.

2. Area of cinema which has experienced the maximum change

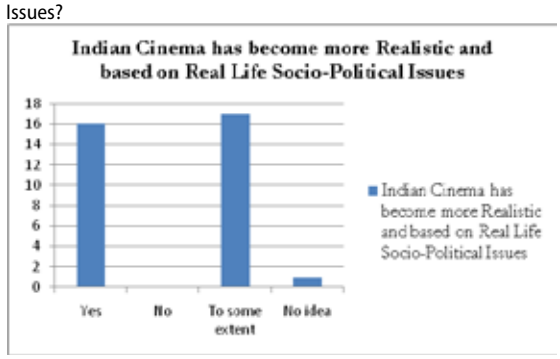
Response to the question, " If yes then which aspect of cinema has experienced the maximum change?



- Majority 55.88% of the viewers were of the opinion that all the aspects of film making has changed, whether its Technology or Creativity or Storyline.
- There was an equal number of viewers , ie 17.64% each whose response was in favour of the fact that both Technology and Storyline of cinemas has experienced a change to the maximum extent.
- Least number of viewers, ie. 8.82% expressed their opinion that the present cinema has developed in terms of its Creativity.

3) Contemporary Indian cinema has become more Realistic and based on Real life Socio-Political Issues

Response to the question, " Do you feel that the contemporary Indian cinema has become more Realistic and based on real life Socio-Political Issues?

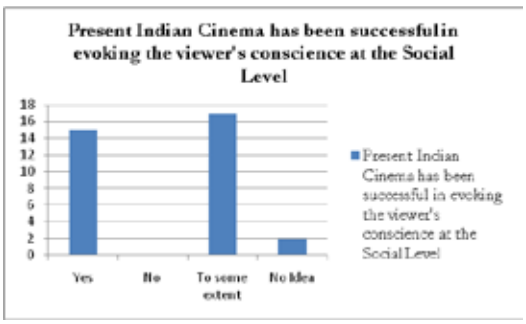


- 50% of the viewers expressed their opinion in favour of the fact that they agree to some extent that present Indian Cinema has become more Realistic and based on Real Life Socio-Political Issues.

- 47.05% of the viewers strongly supported the statement that present Indian Cinema is quite different in comparison to earlier movies in regard to the issues and concepts showcased in it. Very less number of viewers, ie 2.94% of the viewers had no idea about the asked question

4) The present Indian Cinema has been successful in influencing the masses and evoking the viewers conscience at the social level

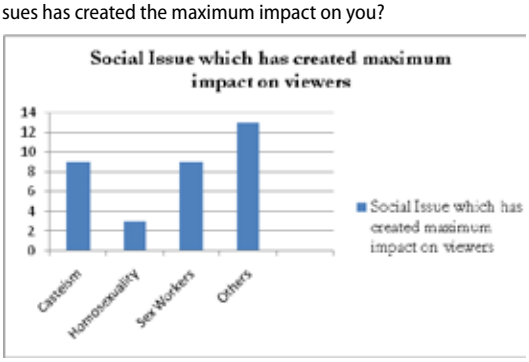
Response to the question, "Do you feel that the present Indian cinema has been successful in influencing the masses and evoking the viewer's conscience at the social level?



- Maximum number of viewers, i.e. 50% of them expressed their opinion that they felt that Indian Cinema to some extent by being more factual and issue-based influences and evokes the viewer's conscience to a great extent.
- 44.11% of the viewers felt that cinema has played a major role in influencing the masses and evoking the viewer's conscience at the social level.
- Least number of viewers gave the answer that they had no idea about the question as they were not so sure whether cinema is actually an instrumental role in this direction. 5.88% of the viewers belonged to this category

5) Social Issue which has created maximum Impact on Viewers

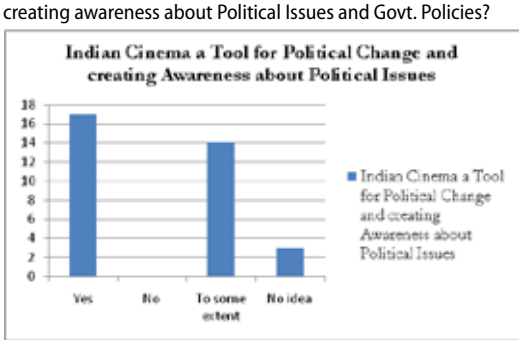
Response to the question, "If yes, then which of the following social issues has created the maximum impact on you?



- Maximum viewers, i.e, 38.23% were of the opinion that besides the three given social issues there were a wide range of other social issues being highlighted by Indian Cinema which were also creating an equal and strong impact on the viewer's psychology and their actions.
- An equal 26.47 % of the viewers thought that highlighting the life style, pains and sorrows of sex workers as well as Casteism was a dominant social issue portrayed by present Indian cinema
- *8.82% of the people supported homosexuality as the most important social issue which has created maximum impa***ct on viewers.**

6) Cinema a tool for Political Change or creating awareness about Political Issues

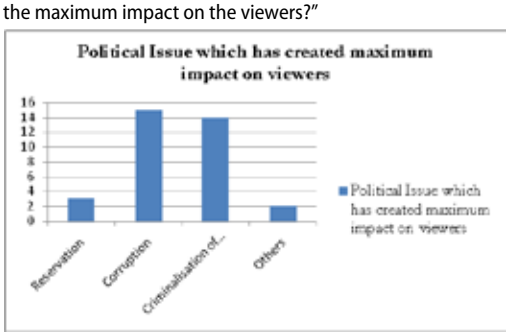
Response to the question, " Can cinema be a tool for Political Change or creating awareness about Political Issues and Govt. Policies?



- The study brought before a major fact that majority of the 50% of viewers thought that Indian Cinema is nowadays becoming a major tool for creating consciousness about some of the most important Political Issues and Government Policies. A good section of the masses who were unaware of the dark side of Indian Politics and the hypocrisy of politicians have to a great extent been exposed to the blatant truth behind the Government Policies.
- 41.17% of viewers thought that Indian cinema nowadays is based on various types of political issues and as a result to some extent it educates and the influences the opinions of the masses at large about Indian Politics and Politicians
- None of the viewers believed that Indian cinema does not influence the masses at all
- 8.82% of the viewers did not have any idea about the question

7) Political Issue which has created maximum impact on the viewers

Response to the question, "If Yes then which Political Issue has created the maximum impact on the viewers?"

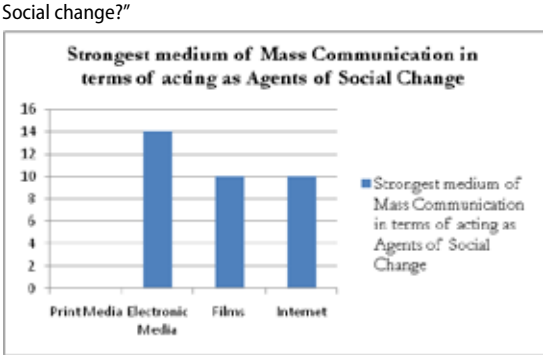


44.11% of the viewers who were convinced by the fact that present Indian Cinema is tremendously influencing the masses by dealing with various political issues, felt that out of all political issues, Corruption was the most dominant issue around which the plots of most of the movies revolve. The feedback was that movies like Rann which showed the relation between media and corrupt politicians. Lage Raho Munnabhai which brought before the concept of lost ideals of country's leaders and had a strong message of how to overcome the problem, created a long lasting impact on the viewers mind and compelled them to think in the direction of Corruption emerging as a very threatening issue in Indian Political System.

- 41.17% of the viewers were in favour of Criminalisation of Politics as the most important Political Issue which has created the maximum impact on viewers. No matter whether its Sarkar Raj, Gulaal, Rajniti, or Satta , most of the movies highlighted the strong relation between crime and politics and its dirty game. The common perception in India is that politics has become the final destination regarding the career of a veteran criminal.
- 8.82% of the viewers pointed out towards Reservation as the most important issue which has created the maximum impact on cinema viewers.
- Maximum percentage of sample respondents were in favour of these three issues as the important ones in terms of its impact on viewers, leaving out 5.88% whose answer was that besides these there are some other issues too which has got strongest impact on viewers.

8) Strongest medium of Mass Communication in terms of acting as Agents of Social Change

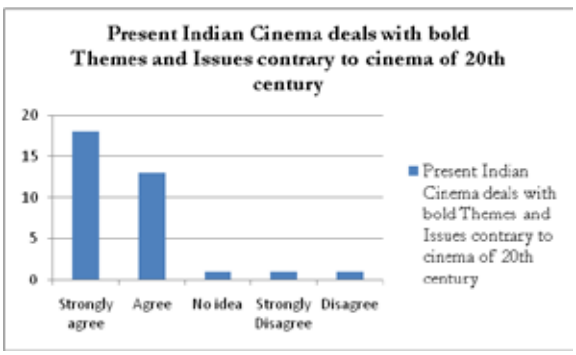
Response to the question, " Which of the following medium of Mass Communication is now the strongest in terms of acting as agents of Social change?"



- Maximum number of sample respondents, i.e 41.17% of them considered Electronic Media as the strongest medium of mass communication in terms of acting as agents of Social Change.
- An equal percentage of 29.41% of sample population supported Films and Internet as Strong Tools of Social Change.
- The survey revealed that people did not consider Print Media as a major agent of Social Change

9) Present Indian Cinema deals with bold themes and issues contrary to cinema of 20th century

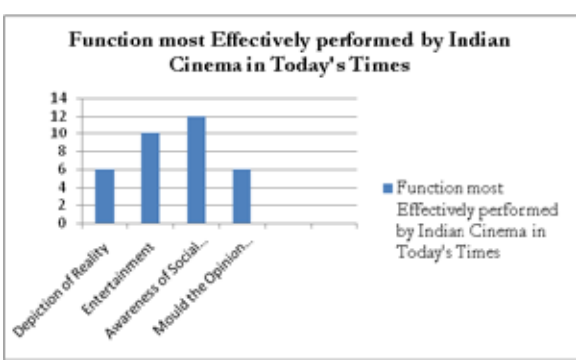
Response to the question, "Do you feel that Indian cinema today deals with certain bold themes and issues which cinema of few years back couldn't have imagined of showcasing?



- The results of the survey positively supported the topic of the research as 52.94% of the surveyed people strongly agreed to the statement that the contemporary Indian cinema has greatly transformed itself specially in regard to its themes and storyline .
- The second highest percentage , i.e 38.23% of people agreed to the fact that present Indian cinema is based on certain bold issues and themes which may be very hard to believe but they are the harsh realities of life.
- Least equal number of people, i.e. 2.94% were of the opinion that either they didn't have any idea about the question or they strongly disagreed or disagreed on it .

10) Function most effectively performed by Indian Cinema in today's times

Response to the question, "Tick any one function which according to you is most effectively performed by Indian Cinema in today's times."



- The survey revealed that majority of the people, i.e 35.29% agreed that present day cinema is playing a very constructive role by bringing before certain facts of society in its original and truthful manner .
- 29.41% of the people considered entertainment as the most important function of present Indian Cinema.
- Depiction of Reality and Moulding the Opinion of the masses about certain facts and issues concerning society and politics was given the same percentage of importance, i.e 17.64% in terms of functions most effectively performed by contemporary Indian cinema.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Indian cinema has therefore transformed to a great extent taking into consideration the fact that people's likings and preferences have also drastically changed. In today's times we find that the viewers prefer watching films to which they can relate to, films which are closer to reality and films which make them think for a while or motivates them to change their point of view regarding certain issues of society. The paper makes an in-depth study of certain films and film makers who have changed the age long tradition of making cinema just for the sake of entertainment, but rather they have used cinema as a very strong tool to highlight certain glaring social issues about which people might not be aware of or they might not have thought of it seriously. The paper thus by giving the examples of few films like No One Killed Jessica, Kahaani, Peepli Live, Rang de Basanti etc tries to focus on the fact that cinema can also be used as a strong tool of Mass Enlightenment and Social Awareness. The paper discusses about few contemporary film makers who have gone into the depth of studying certain social issues in order to bring out the real fact behind the issue in its complete originality and their efforts have resulted in the making of some fine, realistic, issue-based movies which would be always remembered by the masses because of their rich content. Therefore this fact cannot be denied that as the technique of film making has advanced, so has the concept, story and portrayal of characters in Indian Cinema changed. It can therefore be said that Contemporary Indian Cinema to some extent have become issue based and in the coming years there would come a few more talented film makers who would try to give Indian cinema a further more different approach, outlook, concept and theme.

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