



Parallel Cinema: Film Festivals Re-Defining Cinema

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ABSTRACT

India is globally known for its commercial cinema; where in the mainstream cinema has named itself 'Bollywood'. Outsiders, who view Indian commercial films, assume Bollywood is all about 'masala films'. Any movie out of this range will have to prove its worth at every level. These films are termed as "Offbeat" or "The Art House Cinema" or "Parallel Cinema". Many have termed this genre as "the Indian New Wave".

Many people in India plainly call such films as "art films" as opposed to mainstream commercial cinema. Today these films have beautifully transformed and re-invented in this genre. Many distributors do not exhibit these films; most brilliant films go un-noticed with no publicity. The only saving grace for these films could be the 'Film Festivals', where in a panel would view and critique the film. Film festivals are also opened to the public.

KEYWORDS

Parallel cinema, art cinema, Indian new wave, Film Festivals

INTRODUCTION:

Film is considered to be an important art form; it is a source of popular entertainment and a powerful educating medium. The process of making a film can, in itself, be considered a work of art, each stage in film making is a part of art let it be story writing, cinematography, lighting, costumes, editing, music, dance, dialogue in short everything that forms a part of pre-production, production and post-production. It has an interest for aesthetic value more broadly, because film not just mere framing, it has a bit of drama, theatre, music, effects, lights, staging, and sometimes even literature.

India churns nearly 1200 films yearly. They not only help in employment but also in generating revenue for the nation. Film industry is a big business today with Indian Diaspora consisting of millions of Indians, overseas.

HISTORY OF INDIAN CINEMA:

Lumiere Brothers were the first to introduce soundless film in 1899. It was in 1913, were in a soundless film called Raja Harishchandra was produced in India by Dadasaheb Phalke. During the initial days all the movies were 'mythological' theme based as people were religious and the directors created magic on screen using these themes. The 1920's saw the rise of several film directors, trying their hand at making silent Indian movies. It was in 1931, when the first sound film Alam Ara directed by Ardeshir Irani released, it's success inspired directors in South India and various other parts of India including Bengal to also start producing films. Gradually the rest of India joined in the 'bollywood' race and films started to be produced with political and social themes of the era. The name bollywood was a combination of Hollywood and Bombay (Mumbai) which was at the heart of Indian film production.

Bombay Talkies, came up in 1934 and 'Prabhat Studios' in Pune had begun production of films meant for the Marathi language audience. Satyajit Ray founded the Calcutta Film Society in 1949. India got its stalwarts in directors like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Gatak, Guru Dutt, raj Kapoor, Dev Anand, Chetan Anand, Mehmoob Khan, V.Shantaram, Bimal Roy, Kamal Amrohi, K Asif and many more. Many actors and actress saw the stature of success. Songs and music had a huge influence in making a film famous and last ever as classics in people's mind.

Apart from entertaining people, films were the ideal media to educate masses about all sorts of issues. Events in Indian history were reflected in films, from partition to Independence, social problems to evils, love stories all saw success at box office. The 1980s brought in films, lots of violence and Amitabh Bachchan became the 'angry young man' fighting injustices against corrupt leaders and politicians. Gradually themes changed and family issues and social values were brought back into the Indian films. To cater to the global audience, films showing the lives of Indians living abroad and how they coped in Western societies were brought into the Bollywood scene. In 1990, new actors immortalised stories and characters. Actors like Shah Rukh Khan, Aamir Khan, Salman Khan gained fame. Many cross-over movies were also made to cater to the NRI crowd. Directors like Deepa Mehta, Gurinder Chada, Mira Nair, Karan Johar have gained popularity in the west. These days we get to view a lot of 'masala movies', which has a blend of action, drama, thriller, romance, drama, songs and brainless comedy. Today Bollywood is on power in terms of technology, acting, animation, stunts etc to its western counterparts.

PARALLEL CINEMA:

Parallel Cinema as stated by Wikipedia, is a film movement in Indian cinema that originated in the state of Bengal in the 1950s as an alternative to the mainstream commercial Indian cinema. It was inspired by the Italian Neorealism, after Indian New Wave, French New Wave and Japanese New Wave followed. The movement was initially led by Bengali cinema and produced internationally acclaimed filmmakers such as Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak and others. It later gained prominence in other film industries of India. Parallel cinema is known for its serious content, depiction of realism and naturalism; it was in accordance of the socio-political setting in the country. Art cinemas have borrowed content from the Indian literature. They concentrated on a better content rather than unwanted song and dance. These films are termed as "Offbeat" or "The Art House Cinema" or "Parallel Cinema". Many also termed this genre as "the Indian New Wave".

Chetan Anand's Neecha Nagar (1946), a social realist film won the Grand Prize at the first Cannes Film Festival. Bimal Roy's Do Bigha Zamin (1953) won the International Prize at the 1954 Cannes Film Festival. Satyajit Ray's was a pioneer

in making art films, his landmark films were Pather Panchali, Aparajito and Apu Sansar, which formed The Apu Trilogy. Most films made in 60's period were funded by state governments to promote an authentic art genre. Later on, the FFC (Film Funding Corporation) merged with the Indian Motion Picture Export Corporation, to become NFDC (National Film Development Corporation). The NFDC was involved in co-financing Richard Attenborough's biopic Gandhi (1982). The 80's saw numerous parallel cinema releases across the country and get its due recognition.

It also showcased the talent of eminent directors like director Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan, Girish Kasaravalli, Gulzar, Govind Nihlani, Mahesh Bhatt, Aparna Sen, Anurag Kashap, Neeraj Pandey and many more. Parallel cinema gave careers to a whole new breed of actors, like Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil, Amol Palekar, Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Pankaj Kapoor, Deepti Naval, Farooq Shaikh, Irfan Khan, Nawazuddin Siddique, Divya Dutta, Nandida Das and many more. 10 percent of films every year are the contenders for National Awards and at some point the directors made art films for the sake of winning a National award.

By the early 1990s, the rising costs involved in film production and the commercialisation of the films had a negative impact on the art films. The fact that investment returns cannot be guaranteed made art films less popular amongst filmmakers. Underworld financing, political and economic turmoil, reach of television and piracy proved to be fatal threat to parallel cinema, as it declined. Another major reason for the decline was that, NFDC did not seriously look into the distribution or exhibition of these films. The mainstream exhibition system did not pick up these films because these films did not have the so-called 'entertainment value' that they were looking for. Gradually, the government also reduced the patronage of such films.

But with the turn of 21st century, it saw a revival of the parallel cinema, with big corporate houses and studios willing to invest in small budget films and helping the films get the desired recognition and distribution. Films like "3 Deewarein", "Dor", "Iqbal", "Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi", "Is Raat Ki Subah Nahi", "Maine Gandhi Ko Nahi Maara", "Mitr , My Friend", "Mr. and Mrs. Iyer", "15 Park Avenue", "A Wednesday", "Firaq", "My Brother...Nikhil", "Dev D", "Gulaal", "Sikander" were appreciated. Recently made films like "Udaan", "Love Sex Aur Dhokha", "Manorama Six Feet Under", "Khosla ka Ghosla", "Oye Lucky Lucky Oye", "Tere Bin Laden", "Peepli Live", "Phas Gaye Re Obama" "Dobhi Ghaat", "Ship of Theseus" "Lunch Box", and many more have redefined parallel cinema and saw critically acclaim and success.

Difference between Parallel Cinema and Commercial Cinema:

The Parallel Cinema concentrates on contemporary socio-political problems of the country. Realism is core essence of these films. Most of these films are made for the elite audiences and they are expected to change their thought processes. Mostly, there are no idols or stars in art movie. There are only ideas that shake the minds of the viewer. The budget of these films are so minimal, that they cannot afford to create sets, have special costumes or make up, no song-dance sequence, no shoots on foreign land, cannot have many character's above all cannot afford a star to play a protagonist. Common man is shown as a hero. These films are an experimental film forms. But, these days when a 'Superstar' is satisfied with commercial cinema, he/she takes up parallel cinema with the idea of winning an award.

Commercial cinema have humongous budget, superstars, a great technical team, outdoor shoots, huge sets, great dance and song sequences. The new stint of commercial cinema reaching 100 crores is catching up. It has a mix of romance, drama, suspense, action, comedy and a lot of songs

and dance. Songs play a huge requirement in these films, for every action or emotion there are songs. These are mass entertainers, which might or might not have any relevance to realism. These films can help people forget their problems and take them to a fantasy world and see themselves as the hero, fighting the evil and winning.

PUBLICITY/ PROMOTION:

Today producers allocate separate budget for publicity and promotions. The bigger the star, director and the team in the film, is equal to automatic publicity. Before actors just acted and waited for the release with few magazine taking interviews but these days months are spent in promotion. Film is promoted on hoardings, television, newspaper, magazine, radio, online, actor's also travel to various cities and make appearances reality shows for the film promotion. Parallel cinema has no special budget for promotion, its either critics, film festival, or a section of film buffs praising their work and from here it spreads via word of mouth, which might take a long time to reach the target audience. Many movies go unnoticed due to lack of promotion, sometimes even bad movies with good promotion tend to do well. Smaller films with good stories tend to suffer a huge loss as they cannot stand the intense competition from bigger films.

According to a film magazine Bhushan Kumar (T-Series) made Aashiqui 2 on a budget of 8 crores but made a profit of 80 crores with clever marketing. He incorporated two new tracks Sunn raha hai and Tum hi ho, into the nine-song album, took 7,500 spots on TV every week to play the songs and the promos on the loop, ensured that they ruled the FM charts and on YouTube, and eventually moviegoers thronged the theatres to watch this film.

Film Festivals:

The mainstream films, most often are crowd pullers. In the beginning, Film festivals started out showing 'short films' but that did not sustain for long. Then they added different genres or categories to deliver to world audience. The festivals help to bring out the best aspects in these films. Conducting a Film Festival is a big task, but the outcome is not only beautiful, as some of these films are path breaking for the audience. The best entries are selected, these films help to show the socio, economic and political scenarios, make you laugh or cry and sometimes touch your hidden consciousness. These films are for niche audience, if you love true cinema, you won't be disappointed at a Film festival.

For the filmmakers, festivals present a significant way to market their film at a reasonable rate. There are opportunities to network within the industry. Get immediate feedback from audiences and judges. This a humble platform to share tips and information on topics from technical aspects of filming to location hints. Sometimes collaborations and distribution offers are also born. The hard work and passion of the filmmaker put into not only telling their story as well as bringing it to audiences on the festival circuit is greatly appreciated by festival directors, other filmmakers and especially the audiences. These day's actors and directors feel pride in letting others know that their film was appreciated or awarded at a film festival. There is huge media attention to these festivals, who graces the occasion, what they are wearing or which film are they promoting or appreciating, has equally become important. Many films find their distributors or audience through these film festivals.

Some of the positive aspects of Film festivals are that they showcase new talent, it supports local talent: Festivals give preference to filmmakers from the local film community. This encourages and supports the local film community. These festivals also give filmmakers a chance to commune with fellow filmmakers, supporters, media representatives and various professionals, it also promotes tourism in a big way, benefitting the local theatre, the single screen theatre's are helped in a big way and the most important feature is awards or recognition, it benefits the film and its makers.

Some important Film festivals take place at Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Toronto, Locarno, Melbourne, Montreal, Miami, Telluride and many more. In India Film festivals take place at Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata, Goa, Mumbai, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Cochin and Pune to name a few.

STATEMENT OF THE STUDY:

To understand why parallel films though having wonderful stories to convey, with actors essaying the role to the best of their abilities do not make it to a successful mark in terms of getting appreciated by the audience and what are those factors that are not allowing these small budget movies reach its distinct audience. With many Indian films doing really well at Film Festivals, is this medium one of the best platforms for small budget films to get its recognition.

OBJECTIVES:

- Are Film Festivals the best platform available for parallel cinema
- In spite of being 'Good Films' why is parallel cinema not getting acclaimed

METHODOLOGY:

The method of analysis used for this particular study is a three-fold method

1. The 'Case Study' method
2. The Content Analysis Method
3. Expert Opinion

The necessary Content was analysed and studied, along with a few case studies and an expert opinion was also considered to substantiate the study.

CASE STUDIES:

LUNCH BOX (2013):

Lunch Box is a film written and directed by Ritesh Batra, and produced by Guneet Monga, Anurag Kashyap, and Arun Rangachari. The film was jointly produced by various studios including DAR motion pictures, UTV Motion Pictures, Dharma Productions, Sikhya Entertainment, NFDC (India), ROH Films (Germany), ASAP Films (France), and the Cine Mosaic (United States). The film stars Irrfan Khan, Nimrat Kaur and Nawazuddin Siddiqui in lead roles.

STORY:

The Lunchbox has levels to its story - it is the story of a lonely man Saajan Fernandes (Irrfan), he's forgotten what any companionship means. It is the story of a suburban housewife, Ila (Nimrat) deeply alone. One day, a lunchbox prepared by Ila (Nimrat) for her husband somehow reaches Saajan instead. They share an unseen relationship with exchange of ideas, thoughts and philosophy's via food (Chits in the lunch box). Aslam (Nawazuddin), Saajan's trainee, played an important role in making Sajjan see a life beyond his office. Another main character in this film is the city 'Mumbai' the crowd, the rains, local trains to dabbawalas all these elements have a strong sense in the film. Would Ira let go her traditional thoughts, would she accept Saajan, or will Saajan forget the society and plan a future with Ira... The movie is surrounded by these questions till the end!

How Film Festival helped the film: This started out as an Indian-French-German co-production. The movie was made on small budget. In India, the producers were finding it difficult to find distributors, as the film was not like the usual commercial movies, the story was a bit extraordinary and did not star commercial hero's, in short did not have the quality of a crowd puller film. After the film was screened at various film festivals over a year, it got its recognition at the 66th Cannes film festival, where in, it won the Grand Rail d'Or Award at The Critics' Week and the North American movie rights were acquired by Sony Pictures Classics. The media started talking about this film, which gave the film a positive hype, by then one of the Indian producers Guneet Monga of the film met Karan Johar and Siddharth Roy Kapur of UTV, and asked them to come on board as the co-producers and presenter of

the film in India. They were happy with the response that the film received in the film festival's that they decided to help the film release in India.

Guneet Monga, in one of her interviews explained that India and France signed a treaty in 1984 to make films together, but that 'Lunchbox' was the first actual co-production between the countries, nearly 30 years later. When asked Karan Johar, why he was promoting the film he said "Because I'm not capable of making a film like this." And also felt it should be India's official entry to the Oscar's. Irrfan also won an award for the film at The Dubai International film festival. The film was also shown at the Toronto International Film Festival 2013, Amsterdam Film Festival and Telluride Film Festival.

Ship of Theseus:

Ship of Theseus is an Indian film written and directed by Anand Gandhi, and produced by Sohuh Shah. The film explores "questions of identity, justice, beauty, meaning and death through the stories of an experimental photographer, an ailing monk and an enterprising stockbroker", played by Aida El-Kashef, Neeraj Kabi and Sohuh Shah. The title of the film alludes to Theseus' paradox, which inquires if a ship that has been restored by replacing all its parts remains the same ship.

STORY:

Aaliya Kamal (Aida El-Kashef) is a visually impaired and celebrated photographer in the process of undergoing a cornea transplant that will restore her vision. Though the surgery is a success and Aaliya's vision is restored, she has trouble adjusting to her newfound sense of sight and is dissatisfied with her resulting photography.

Maitreya (Neeraj Kabi), an erudite monk, is part of a petition to ban animal testing in India. When he is diagnosed with liver cirrhosis, his reluctance towards medication is questioned and he must now depend on the people he's been fighting against a path he refuses to take.

A very young stockbroker, Navin (Sohuh Shah), has just had his kidney transplanted. He soon learns of a case of kidney tourism involving an impoverished bricklayer, Shankar. His initial fear is that his new kidney originally belonged to this man. Further investigation proves otherwise, but Navin takes matters into his own hands and confronts the actual recipient in Stockholm.

How Film Festival helped the film: After three years in development, the film premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival 2012, where it received great critical acclaim and was touted as "the hidden gem of the year". Subsequently it was screened at the Tokyo International Film Festival, the BFI London Film Festival, the Dubai International Film Festival, the Mumbai Academy of Moving Images, the Brisbane International Film Festival, the Rotterdam International Film Festival and the Hong Kong International Film Festival 2013. The film was screened at Munich and Transylvania where it won the Best Film and Best Cinematography awards. It was also shown at the Sydney Film festival, where Anand, the director was invited to be a part of the international jury.

Though the film was highly appreciated, the media did not give the film its worth of appreciation. Nobody was willing to present or distribute the film in India, as the story was unusual, with an unknown cast. Kiran Rao, watched this film at Enlighten Films' Naya Film Festival and decided to come on board and present the film. She also managed to get UTV to distribute the film. In one of her interviews Kiran said that the story had depth and it could touch the soul of the viewers. She did not want such a brilliant film to go unnoticed, thus she lent her name which did wonders to the film in terms of publicity and promotion. She also mentioned that she was aware that media saw her as Aamir Khan's wife and a strong Director, and felt this could also help the movie. The film released in India and was well appreciated by the critics.

EXPERT OPINION:

Expert Opinion: H N Narahari Rao, Artistic director of 6th Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFFes).

Mr. Rao urges creating good sections (categories) is an important aspect in film screening. The categories at BIFFes was Cinema of the world, Indian competition, Asian (NETPAC) competition, Kannada competition (for local flavour), Films from Hof film festival, Country focus (Taiwan, Poland), Raj Kumar films, Samurai Films, Italian neo-realism, Bimal Roy films, Special homage films, retrospective films on Malini Fonseka, Goran Paskaljevic and Claire Denis and Special topic (this time the theme was Trains) . 'This is done so that we can cater to world audience, different people like different film, it's a mixed platter,' he adds. He mentions how he has to keep abreast with all the film festivals across the world, keep a track of which film is winning which critics award or getting good reviews. He also opined that he did have any problem in showing a film that was made few years back or even if it is released as long as they have not been screened in this film festival.

When asked about the procedure and selection of films he said "Once the government sends us the order we start to advertise through website. There are certain forums which help in bringing good and deserving films to our notice. Sometimes the directors directly approach us with their screeners or a country embassy which is in India sends it across to us for free. Some directors want to use film festivals to premier their films. Then we have a panel which will scrutinise the films and select the best according to the categories. I am particular about the selection. This year we screened 160 films. We do charge a nominal fee to the entries, as all film festivals do." He felt that the theatres need to upgrade their technology, when compared to the western counterparts. When asked the importance of film festivals he said "it is a wonderful platform to exchange ideas about film making and technology. Film festivals are a gruelling process. Smaller films want to have premiers at film festival as it will help the film with media attention. If a film is shown at a film festival that itself is a win, as the film would have been selected by the panel, according to their criteria and if your film wins an award it is double luck, you can always add this to the film posters and promotion that this movie is an award winner or been to so many film festivals. Another importance is 'collaboration' that takes place between countries to make films. These days it is state of pride to have your films screened at film festivals." BIFFes has constantly got the best films together at its film festival, which is why; it is in the forefront in its 6th consecutive year. This shows that film festivals are getting popular day by day and are providing a bigger platform, for film enthusiast.

FINDINGS:

Film festivals are a good option: The case studies also hint that film festivals play an important role in getting small budget films its due recognition. As Mr. Rao states 'getting your movie screened in a film festival is a matter of pride as it has been selected by the panel among the numerous entries.

Promotion and media publicity: Film Festivals also help in the marketing and promotion of the film. With the right 'media exposure' parallel cinema can have a better run at the theatres. Media also needs to give the required publicity to film festivals, as they can help in informing and promoting the films.

Factors affecting parallel cinema: Today cinema has become a money making business. At the end of the day it's the box office that has to do the talking with respect to the earnings. Countries like Iran are making wonderful parallel cinema, which have children essaying roles to the ease. The stories are wonderful. But they don't have the immense competition like a parallel cinema faces in Indian from commercial cinema or various regional cinemas. Thus, not having a big star in the film, no big names to back the film, no budget for promotions or publicity, some films never get to see the light as distributors are not ready to take a risk

Government instigation required: The State and Central Government need to make better facilities to help these films. Start a special chamber or community to address their problems like release, distribution, promotion or even funds. Government should allocate special budget to produce films with great aesthetic content.

CONCLUSION:

Commercial films big or small always reach its audience. But to make a film with social message and not taking it to the masses, would not help. Sometimes it seems that social issue based films are made for awards or an elite audience. The Film festivals also act as a saving grace to many such films. When any critic or film enthusiast is asked about their favourite film, they tend to name an offbeat film (parallel film), though they would have given a thumbs up to a commercial film, they don't give those film the critic's award. Some of these films are too serious and filled with facts and harsh reality that the audience feels emotionally burden with the films content as it can be depressing. They would like to enter this unreal and glamorous world to forget their problems. Encouraged by the trend, young and enthusiastic film makers have begun to experiment with themes and scripts without losing sight of its commercial aspects.

Movies like Swadesh, Rang De Basanti, Taare Zameen Par, Munna Bhai MBBS or Peepli Live, have effectively conveyed a social message without becoming dull or boring. A film with reality can be disturbing and it may not have an influence but reality in smaller dosage can be retained longer. Thus, we can revive the golden years of parallel cinema with a pinch of commercialisation.

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