



REINVENTING THE SAGA OF HINDI CINEMA: ANGRY YOUNG MAN AS THE NEW PROTAGONIST

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Abstract

Till pre-1974 the Hindi film audience in India was subjected to an unending stream of romantic tale depicted in the movies of that era. Somehow the viewing public seems to have got disenchanted at this seemingly unrelenting assault on their senses. Then came Zanjeer and the rest is history. The decade i.e 1970-1980 was a decade of disgruntlement. Discontentment ruled the roost all through this period. The Indian gentry cutting across the age barrier seems to have been drowned in the deluge of the corrupted polity. An aura of negativity percolated down the line. The government of the day seems to have little or no answer to the issues afflicting the society.

The man on the street started relating himself to the Bachchan persona as he (Amitabh Bachchan) exemplified the exact nature of the problems faced by the common man. The people identified themselves with the figure of the Angry Young Man and there evolved a common bonding between the Man on the screen and the Man on the street. The issues of the working class have been deftly portrayed in this genre of movies.

The paper seeks to highlight the intricacies of Indian masses and the way out for redemption. The latter seem to have been made possible through the action of the principle male protagonist of the Hindi cinema of the day - Amitabh Bachchan. Almost all his starrers like Deewar, Kala Patthar, Trishul etc. portrayed the physical, moral as well as psychological trauma of the Indian people especially the middle and the lower class. Thus, the ordinary man started sensing that he was also capable of leading a dignified life after passing through this maze of adversities.

Introduction

Cinema is one of the most acclaimed and most convincing means of communication as it develops a relationship between the protagonists and the audience. Cinema has its roots in India since the late nineteenth century. The first feature film, 'Raja Harish Chandra,' was made by Dada Saheb Phalke in 1913. Then in 1931, 'Alam Ara,' the first talkie film was shown. This film featured Prithviraj Kapoor. The 50s was the era of Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor. Rajesh Khanna in the 60s came up on the screen as a romantic hero. The viewing public seemed to have got tired by watching an unending stream of romantic tales. Then came 'Zanjeer' (1973) which brought a new wave in the Hindi cinema. At a time when India was suffering from unemployment, smuggling and black marketing, the common man was left bristling with anger and frustration over the establishments. Zanjeer brought a stream which began shifting Hindi cinema into a different direction- the direction of protest and revolt. The term 'angry young man' can be traced back to the condition of post-world war Britain in the 1950s where the people were disillusioned by the effect of the two world wars, unemployment, and social disparity. There was a feeling of animosity among the people. This led John Osborne to create the iconic character of 'Jimmy Porter' through the play 'Look back in Anger.' Jimmy was angry at the establishment which denied him the position and the respect he deserved. Jimmy was addressed as an 'Angry Young Man'- this phrase became so popular that it was adapted by Hindi cinema as well.



The 70s was one of the most chaotic periods in India's history. It was like a vertiginous roller-coaster ride full of ups and downs. Unemployment, poverty, violence, and corruption pulled the country into a maze of dubiety. After independence, the dreams of crores and crores of Indians got shattered. Rage, anger, and frustration were in the heart of Indians. Perhaps this rage, this frustration, this anger was when given the shape of a character then a great actor like Amitabh Bachan took over the silver screen as the 'Angry Young Man.' Film 'Zanjeer' gave birth to the character of Vijay- who through the fire of his anger ignited the spark of revolt in millions of Indians. Till the time Amitabh Bachan was cast for Zanjeer he played the roles of doctor, poet, dejected lover but his character in this film somehow synchronized with the need of time. He changed the concept of 'Hero.' His character (Vijay) was a shift from the characters who were too good to be real, that was the outcome of the irritation of the people who could no longer identify themselves with the idealism of the romantic heroes. The issues of the working class have been deftly portrayed in this genre of movies. Movies like 'Zanjeer' and 'Deewar' exemplify the exact nature of the problems faced by an ordinary person in his everyday life.

The film 'Zanjeer' is about the story of Vijay Khanna, an honest police officer whose parents were murdered when he was small by a man of unknown identity on a white horse. Vijay has recurring nightmares about the white horse and the only thing he remembers about the murderer is his bracelet. Vijay receives complaints about a man named Sher Khan who runs gambling dens. They both engage themselves in a fight but at the end of the fight Sher Khan gains respect for Vijay's honesty, he chooses to close his gambling dens and becomes a loyal friend of Vijay. One of the gang leaders of the underworld, Teja, creates unabated disharmony in the town when a traffic accident takes place leaving several innocent children dead. Vijay gets to know that

Teja is the person behind the accident. Eventually, Vijay is trapped in a false case of bribery and his position and title are taken away and he is jailed for 6 months.

After 6 months of jail, Vijay is released. A man named De Silva meets him and tells that his three sons had died by drinking poisoned wine. This case leads Vijay back to Teja and he discovers that Teja is the person who killed his parents by recognizing the Zanjeer (chain) on his wrist. Vijay manages to kill Teja.

Sher Khan's character is an amalgamation of various virtues such as honesty, integrity, and chivalry. Through this film, we get to see people like Teja who are supposed to be honest businessmen but are rather a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Vijay came with an image of rebellious and rancorous anti-hero seethed with anger. This film also reflects the helplessness of the police. Law is considered to be the paragon of justice but when injustice is inflicted on Vijay, the Police Commissioner himself is unable to help him. DeSilva does not go to the police for seeking justice for his son's death rather calls Vijay for help as he knows that if anybody can help him is Vijay and not the government.

Deewar (1975) is one of the most acclaimed films in the Hindi cinema written by Slim-Javed and directed by Yash Chopra demonstrating the tumultuous socio-political state of India in the 1970s. The film opens with the story of an honest trade union leader Anand Verma who works for the betterment of the struggling laborers. Anand is blackmailed by a corrupt industrialist who threatens to kill his wife and two sons (Vijay and Ravi) if he does not stop the protest and signs the agreement. Anand signs the agreement and is attacked by the fellow workers for betraying them. Out of shame, Anand leaves the town. His wife (Sumitra) and sons are left alone in poverty. Some of the angry workers tattoo Vijay's arm with the words, 'Mera baap chor hai' (My father is a thief.) (Deewar, 1975) Sumitra comes to Bombay with her children and works as a laborer on a construction site.



The first part of the movie depicts the kind of labor unrest in the country which was there after the declaration of the Emergency. Vijay, at a young age, starts working as a boot polisher in order to provide education to his younger brother Ravi. Vijay grows with the bitter memory of his father's failure, works as a coolie and fighting for the rights of the common man becomes a smuggler of the underworld. He takes the wrong path in order to climb the social ladder, but one noticeable thing is that Vijay is a fighter who keeps on fighting from the beginning till the end. He joins the underworld, not out of greed or lust for money, but rather he feels that through this he can efficiently fulfill the needs of his family and give them a life of comfort which they were devoid of. Vijay is a rebel with a cause.

It was a high time for a film like *Deewar* to get released when there was lack of jobs and jobs were given only on recommendations, there was a social disparity, the government had no answer to the questions raised by the common man. This film, however, earned out the space of footpath in a very distinct manner, footpath becomes the home to the homeless. Through the representation of the story of Sumitra and her sons, the film highlights the struggle for survival of the endless number of migrants who move to the metropolis in search of a better life.

The footpath becomes the school where Vijay and Ravi learn to grow up. Vijay takes up shoe polish on the footpath and Ravi goes to school and later becomes a police inspector. At every turn, Vijay gets reminded of their lines on the footpath. Vijay says to Ravi, "Ravi, tumhe yaad hai bachpan me kitni raatein footpath pe khali pet guzari." (Deewar, 1975) Some of the most impactful dialogues on the footpath were created in the film. The young Vijay refuses to pick up the money thrown at him when he does shoe polish, saying, 'Hum boot polish karta hai koi bheek nahi mangta, paise utha ke haath me do.' (I polish boots, not beg for money, pick up the money and put it in my hands.) (Deewar, 1975)

Looking at this, the mafia don Davar says, "Ye umar bhar boot polish nahi karega, ek din ye ladka kuch banega." (Deewar, 1975).

Soon Vijay shifts from the footpath to the skyscraper and buys the same skyscraper as a gift to his mother where she used to work as a laborer. The adversities of his childhood sting Vijay each and every moment which makes him achieve heights but through unlawful means. Looking at the persona of Vijay, one gets a feeling that it was prophesied much earlier by the Don that he'll be a 'Lambi race ka ghoda.' (Deewar, 1975)

There is a subtle ambience of secularism in both the films. Billa No. 786, the number 786 is considered sacred in Islam. Vijay considers it a lucky charm which saves him whenever he's in danger. Despite being from different religions Vijay and Sher Khan are very good friends. Vijay puts his life in danger in order to ensure that De Silva (a Christian) gets justice.

Conclusion

Vijay belongs to the generation which is aloof, hopeless and aimless. Throughout the movie, Vijay constantly exhibits his anger against the society. He feels helpless as he is unable to abate the agonies of his people and his idealism does not get the desired result. He feels helpless on his situation and the situation of the millions of people who belong to the lower-middle class. He was frustrated as he was born in a society which is completely unjust.

The memorable saga created by Salim-Javed has been widely recognized all over the globe. The movies of this genre are a juxtaposition of the Gandhian ideals of non-violence as the protagonists of these movies are more aggressive and confrontational. The voice of Amitabh Bachan becomes the voice of the protest against the corrupt society. The mood and the temper of Vijay (the hero) represent the general atmosphere of the post-independent India which was marred with great social and political upheaval. The people got a hero, a hero they could identify with.



References

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