



Research Article

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Hindi Cinema and Society: A study on the perception of Indian youth

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ABSTRACT

For Indians, Cinema has remained integral since its inception in society. Films have evolved from black-and-white to color; from several reels to a single showreel; from no animations to varied forms and techniques; and from single-screen theatres to multiplexes/multiple screens too. The researchers have chosen the social drama genre from the spectrum of diverse genres to study. The researchers are curious to know the perception of youth towards the mentioned genre, especially those who belong to the age group of 18 to 23 years. This research aims to study whether or not movies belonging to the social drama genre make the desired impact on society against social evils. With the ever-increasing number of social issues in the country, even during the present pandemic situation, this study holds significance in trying to know if one of the empowering tools of the Indian society for generating awareness is empowering or forbidding. The present study is conducted by keeping "Bollywood" (Hindi cinema) in the nucleus because of the researchers' zealous fondness towards Hindi movies. Because of the unprecedented times of the Covid-19 pandemic, the data for the research have been collected using Google forms and combined with the data of 200 respondents, majorly from, but not limited to, the Western part of India. The study findings interestingly unveil that the majority of the youth believe the social issues are majorly seen in the middle economic class of Indian society. The majority also does not agree or is neutral with the statement that the social drama Hindi films could bring the desired change in society.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Ever since the inception of cinema in the mid-1890s, without the narrative till the early 1900s, where narrative in a film gradually emerged, and from there on till date, genres have been instrumental as a way of classification of movies. Drawing from the literary genre criticism theories, genres have been understood as similarities between the stylistic or thematic treatment of the overall film, in its narrative structure, aesthetic approach or emotional response. (Sobchack, 1975) says that the genre films are bound by a strict set of conventions, tacitly agreed upon by the filmmaker and the audience and that it provides the experience of an ordered world. In other words, genre movies are those commercial feature films that, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations (Grant, 2003). There has

always been a visible appeal for the genres and how an audience receives them. Besides, even the producers have been witnessed categorizing films, particularly for the bigger intent of receiving considerable audience response. Executives of studios look for screenplays in particular genres because they know that audiences are drawn to stories told in identifiable genres (Selbo, 2014).

Indian cinema, right from its dawn, in 1913 with *Raja Harishchandra* by Dada Saheb Phalke, has been narrative oriented. Looking at the films of that era, it can be clearly seen that either the films were based on mythological subjects or social issues. It is a common sense of humanity that is promoted through social drama films along with some sense of shared responsibility. This goes on to give the films the power to foster positive change. Films that belong to social drama were prominent right from the beginning of Indian Cinema (Gokulsing & Dissanayake,

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1998). The stories were conceptualized right in society giving voice to the voiceless and highlighting the plight of various people. However, it was Parallel Cinema that came to be known as synonymous with social dramas. In the 1970s, Indian cinema developed a more socially aware and politically orientated form of cinema, partly subsidized by public funding, known as Parallel Cinema, running alongside but clearly distinguished from mainstream cinema (Stafford, 2006). The filmmakers presented the social issues by fusing them with Indian flavor, mostly categorized as films with a social message set in the framework of melodrama. (Gokulsing, & Dissanayake, 1998). Many social drama films come with a theme of transit and the importance of familial relationships, which grants strength to the genre as the audience is mostly seen to follow the protagonist to come to a viable solution. (Ahmed, 1992) argues that popular cinema in India may be employed as a metaphor for society... wherein it allows us to see how people perceive themselves, their values, and their behavior. Ahmed further concludes that society and cinema share a close relationship reflecting each other's norms and nature.

There were class and caste statements in Indian cinema to begin with (Deshpande, 2007). The social class divide and the very fabric have always been evident in Indian Cinema. *Chauranga, Fandry, Sairat, Jagte Raho, Aarakshan, Khap, Bandit Queen, Sadgati, Ankur, Sujata* or *Achhut Kanya* are just a few examples. The general poverty was portrayed as a result of unfavorable circumstances often engineered by evil personified in estate managers (zamindars) or relatives (Deshpande, 2007). Films of the 1950s, such as *Awara, Pyaasa*, and *Mother India*, explored India's postcolonial aspirations and examined social issues such as corruption, poverty, and the growing urban-rural divide (Mishra, 2002). Besides, women-centric films, along with discourse on gender, have always found their place in cinema. Women are a major chunk of the country's population; hence, their portrayal on screen is crucial in determining the furtherance of existing societal stereotypes (Tere, 2012). Much discussed but less portrayed in mainstream cinema, other genders too have found their voices reflected in Indian cinema time and again. Generally, films portray homosexual characters either for humor or merely as an element to show a distinctive sexual identity. But they do not try to show the situations or circumstances that help a person look into one's own identity. There are internal as well as external factors that shape a person's sexual behavior (Pooja & Rekha, 2018). In addition to highlighting only the genders and having their say, the films have also shown sexual violence over time, which has led to contemplating into what goes into making such films. Moderate sexual violence is depicted as fun, enjoyable, and a normal expression of romantic love. Victims were more likely to be women rather than men, and sexual violence committed by heroes was a common portrayal, particularly moderate

violence such as harassment of women with whom the heroes ultimately became romantically involved (Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003).

(Barry, 2005) defines perception theory as a way of describing the application of neurological research and accepted psychological principles to the study of visual communication. Mainstream audiences of popular Indian cinema adopt a participatory and interactive style of viewing (Srinivas, 2002). In the way of how the audience consumes social drama films, it becomes crucial to understand the manner in which the mind receives certain information, which in turn adds significant information to the study of visual communication and would help the researcher assess the effectiveness of the content in more authentic terms. It has often been assumed that audience responses can be read from box office takings or film texts. Assertions are also made about how young male audiences of Hindi commercial films go to the cinema because they like action, nudity and sex, while young female audiences deplore it and go to view moral narratives, romance, and melodrama (Banaji, 2006). When talking about youth and its engagement to the cinema, here Hindi films are mostly looked upon at a superficial level, and more needs to be deliberated seriously with the sociocultural contexts of cinema consumption or the meanings young audience derives.

The present paper thus aims to deliberate on the involvement of youth, particularly its perception towards Hindi films that belong to the social drama genre. Using parameters like preferences, opinions, exposure to films, and, most importantly, how youth feel about certain notions in the context of cinema, the paper attempts to throw light on how the young audience receives social drama Hindi films. It also thus gives it out to the cinematic industry at a larger level on how films of this genre can be conceived for a particular target group.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Study

- To understand the perception of Youth towards Hindi cinema of the social drama genre
- To understand whether social drama movies could bring the desired change in the society

Universe

The universe of the study was that the youth group belongs to the age group of 18-23 years.

Sample Size

Total of 200 responses have been received through Google form.

Tools of Data Collection

- Primary tool: A self-structured questionnaire.



- Secondary: Published/unpublished articles, research papers, websites, books, journals, etc.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in the average perception score of youth towards social drama movies concerning their preference to watch social drama movies.
 H₀: There is no significant difference in the average perception score of youth towards the social drama movies concerning their age difference.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Chart 1.1

Chart 1.1 signifies the age of the respondents. The above chart depicts that the majority of the respondents fall under the age of 21 years. The second in line falls under the age of 23 years.

Chart 1.2

Chart 1.2 signifies that the majority (64.4%) of the respondents prefer to watch movies about the social drama genre.

Chart 1.3

Chart 1.3 signifies the responses to the questions on how many movies they have watched relating to the social drama genre. *OMG, Oh My God* and *PK* have topped the list with 91.2% & 89.7%, respectively. However, *Mee Raqsam* movie has not received any response. The second lowest in the row are *Setters, Khap*, and *Shukranu*, with negligible responses.

Chart 1.4

Chart 1.4 surprisingly represents that the majority of respondents under the study believe that the middle economic class is affected by social problems, whereas it is a known fact that no economic division is left behind in terms of social problems. If we consider discussing on serious issues like drug abuse and rape, there is a consistent increase in both issues, irrespective of the religion/caste/economic class divisions. One of the reports published in *The Times of India* in 2020 has quoted that India sees 88 rape cases a day. One of the surveys titled “Substance Abuse” in 2019 emphasized that India’s drug

2. Age (Needs to be between 18 years to 23 years)
194 responses

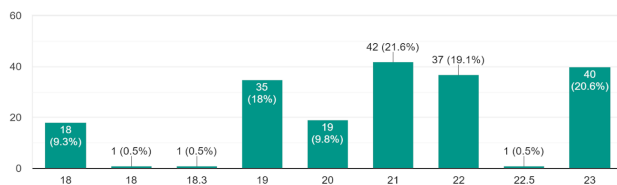


Chart 1.1: Age of the respondents.

6. Do you prefer to watch the movies that belong to the social drama genre?
194 responses

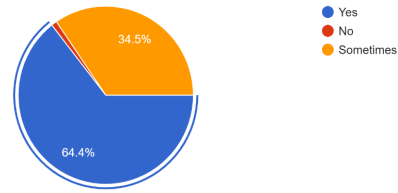


Chart 1.2: majority (64.4%) of the respondents prefer to watch movies about the social drama genre. .

9. Please put a tick mark against the movies which you have already watched.
194 responses

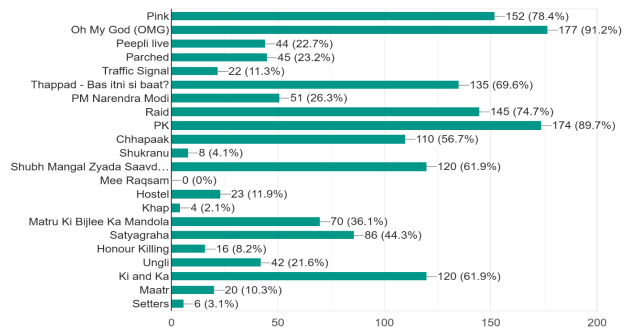


Chart 1.3: Responses on how many movies they have watched related to social drama genre.

194 responses

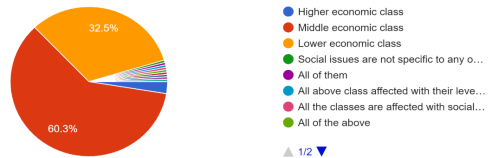


Chart 1.4: Economic class/division of indian society has been affected with more social issues.

194 responses

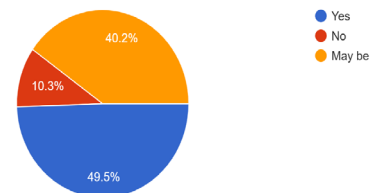


Chart 1.5: Respondents’ opinions on the statement that social drama create a desired impact on society.

problem is now huge. (Published in *The Times of India*, 2020)

Chart 1.5

Chart 1.5 depicts respondents’ opinions on the statement that social drama movies could create a desired impact on society in the long run. Most of them believed that the social drama movies could create the desired impact on society in the long run.

194 responses

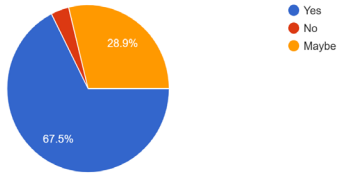


Chart 1.6: The social drama movie could sensitize people at large on a particular social issue.

194 responses

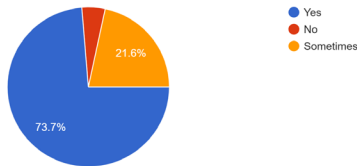


Chart 1.7: Any social drama movies in the past had compelled you to think or reflect upon the social issues from

194 responses

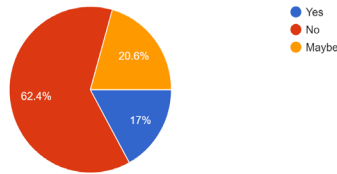


Chart 1.8: The social drama movies get similar response from the general audience, as the movies of other genre get.

194 responses

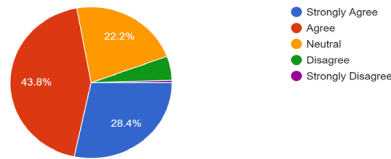


Chart 2.1: The impact of the social drama movie is not always deep rooted and sustainable.

194 responses

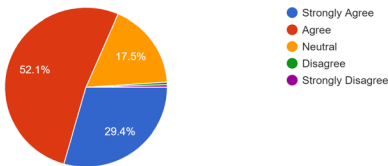


Chart 2.2: The social drama movies are helpful in encouraging people to raise their voices against any injustice/social evils.

Table 1: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	18.483	19	.973	1.084	.371
Within Groups	156.176	174	.898		
Total	174.660	193			

Table 2: ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.264	19	.224	.941	.534
Within Groups	41.510	174	.239		
Total	45.773	193			

Chart 1.6

Chart 1.6 shows the opinions of respondents on the statement- the social drama movie could sensitize people at large on a particular social issue. The majority of respondents believed that the social drama movie is a powerful tool to sensitize the people at large on a particular issue.

Chart 1.7

Chart 1.7 shows the opinions of respondents on the statement- the social drama movie compelled them to think or reflect upon the social issue from a different angle. The majority of respondents agreed with the statement.

Chart 1.8

Chart 1.8 : The same set of respondents also answered to the statement that such kinds of social drama genres do not get the response as the movies of other genres.

Chart 2.1

Chart 2.1 portrays the views on the statement that the impact of the social drama movie is not always deep-rooted and sustainable. The portrayed social issue becomes “talk of the town” across all social media for a particular duration, and then it is forgotten. The majority agreed with the statement, and at the same time, 28.4% strongly agreed with the statement. These both altogether occupy the major part of the chart.

Chart 2.2

Chart 2.2 draws the graph on views on the statement that the social drama movies are helpful in encouraging people to raise their voices against any injustice/social evils. Here also majority of the respondents got agreed with the statement.

Hypothesis Testing

H₀: There is no significant difference in the average perception score of youth towards social drama movies concerning their preference to watch social drama movies Table 1.

As all the conditions of the ANOVA got fulfilled, the researcher chose to adopt ANOVA. The table contains 0.371 as the p-value. Therefore, the researcher fails to reject H₀ here.

H₀: There is no significant difference of the average perception score of youth towards the social drama movies with respect to their age difference Table 2.



As all the conditions of the ANOVA got fulfilled, the researcher chose to adopt ANOVA. The table contains 0.534 as the p-value. Therefore, the researcher fails to reject H_0 here.

CONCLUSION

“The world is not dangerous because of those who do harm but because of those who look at it without doing anything.”—Albert Einstein.

The film is enormously impacted by society, and society is likewise significantly affected by the film. Movies attempted to depict social reflection through the big screen since the beginning of the entire cinema industry. Movies have been the intuitive medium to sensitize civilians on various social issues. Different movies have propelled, inspired, and surprisingly changed the general public's mindset on the issues of casteism, social separation, zamindari framework, unapproachability, women empowerment and so forth. If not changed the mentality entirely, the movies at least have compelled people to see the issue from a different angle. From gender mainstreaming to de-stressing the caste/class ties (at least to a little extent), movies have played a significant role in molding society. There are inevitable instances too, which have not only influenced but also fostered the food, hair, or clothing pattern of society. We have already heard terms like, “*Sadhna cut or Tere Naam cut.*” An article from The Indian Express stated that how film *Toilet Ek Prem Katha* accelerated the Indian campaign of prohibition of open defecation through a love story, which was composed by Ms. A. Kameshwari. The same article additionally conveyed that Kaya Construct Company made 24 toilets in 24 hours in India to steer the speed of the mission. A study titled “Can a Film Create a Movement?” by Ms. Shoma A. Chatterji, pointed out the problem of menstrual hygiene in different states of India. She described the efforts of an NGO namely, The Alo Female Co-operative Credit Society situated in the Balu ghat city of West Bengal, who have trained 20 women to prepare sanitary pads after getting influenced by the movie ‘*Padman*’. On the contrary, some researchers have also criticized the portrayal of queer community or LGBTQA+ community in Bollywood. They have criticized that most of the time, such characters in movies are given a comedy role to play or have been added as a fun element in the plot, they also have been shown doing vulgar bodily movements, which has increased the gender disparity (Wellborn, 2015).

The data in hand concludes that most respondents feel that it is the middle economic class that is affected by social

issues the most. In this regard, the researchers believe that social issues affect almost all class divisions. There could be a possibility of the differences lying in terms of the prevalence, intensity and frequency of a particular social issue. Most respondents give impetus to having popular actors in a film for better appeal but negate the importance of a director for giving proper justification to a social drama film. On the one hand, the respondents say that social drama films help to sensitize to social issues and compel the audience to reflect on the issues.

On the other hand, they are not sensitized to all social drama films. This is evident because some films have received negligible viewing responses. For instance, *Mee Raqsam*, which a single respondent does not watch. Most respondents feel that women-centric issues are being projected more than other societal issues. Most respondents feel that the issue presented in the film becomes ‘talk of town’ and soon fades off, which again contradicts their own belief that such films sensitize them to social issues. So, sensitization isn't sustained. Most respondents feel neutral or say that social drama films don't give rise to violence or crime. However, many researchers claim that social films influence the audience in violent and crime related activities.

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